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More than Words, More than Wounds: (Re)Writing 'Wounded' Women and Healing Pedagogies

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MORE THAN WORDS, MORE THAN WOUNDS:
(RE)WRITING 'WOUNDED' WOMEN AND
HEALING PEDAGOGIES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and the
College of Arts & Sciences
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Interdepartmental Program in Comparative Literature

by
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this manuscript to two groups of individuals dear to my heart:

To my wonderful family
for strengthening my faith and
for loving me before, during, and beyond this story.

Thank you for standing beside me
and for holding me in your hearts throughout the years.

And

To those who have yet to recognize that there is more,
there is creation,
there is healing
beyond the wounds.

May you know that there is hope,
and may you find the courage to one day share your story.

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to all of my former students; each has impacted me in unique ways while simultaneously strengthening the very reasons why I began this journey.

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PREFACE: STORYING MYSELF

*The story never really begins nor ends, even though
there is a beginning and an end to every story,
just as there is a beginning and end to every teller...
[but] [l]et me tell you a story. For all I have is a story...
- Trinh (1, 119)*

May 8, 2007, I ended it. For good this time. ‘We’ were officially over. This on-again, off-again rollercoaster of a ride disguised as love had finally stopped. And I refused to ever let it be turned (on) again by ‘him.’ Too many times ‘we’ crashed, and I burned. Too many times ‘he’ apologized, and I took him back. Six years of being ab/used by someone I thought I could never live without.

The slash. The slash in the word adds comfort. Even now, the word ‘abuse’ seems too overdramatic for ‘me.’ Sometimes I build up the courage to verbalize it. Sometimes I even have the strength to say that it was psychological and emotional abuse. But even now, my heart pounds with distress in attempts to give language to this part of my past, a past that I know will always be present in varying nuances.¹

He ‘loved’ me. In his own way. And I... I thought I loved ‘us’ enough for both of us, enough to make it work. Truth is, when ‘we’ were together, ‘I’ was missing. And I hurt. I cried. I hated it. At times, I even hated him. And myself.

But he ‘loved’ me. Not in the way that my grandfather loved my grandmother. Not even in the way that a parent loves a child. But in the way that shadows itself. In a way that defines

¹ My advocacy article titled “Abuse: A Journey Towards Claiming the Term” published in *The Voice: The Journal of the Battered Women’s Movement* is a short piece that includes some of my journal entries about my experience to set up my stance that even the term ‘abuse’ is difficult to claim. But by using the term and rhetorically placing responsibility on the abuser coupled with telling personal stories, individuals who have experienced abuse engage with both accountability and healing possibilities, for self and others. (This article echoes portions of this preface, as it was written after beginning the preface; permission from the journal to use the same information is in Appendix.)

desire. Pure, selfish, must-have, erotic desire. It was not unconditional. No. I see that now, and I probably knew that then. But I was stubborn, and I wanted to believe... that *he 'loved' me*.

After all, if he did not love me, what would that say about 'me'? What kind of a person allows someone to treat her like 'that'? Who puts up with years of abuse? Abuse. Is that really what it is called? He never left visible bruises. He never left black eyes. Society tells 'us' that 'that' is 'abuse.' Truth be told, I wanted him. I asked him to come over. I needed him as much as he needed me. I was willing to be ab/used as long as I had him. Yes, we had developed our dysfunctional patterns—and we became quite dependent upon each other. And time and time again, I knew how the scene would play out. I knew how the story would end, that one story embedded within 'our story.' Only for it to begin again.

We had complicated our story without beginnings and without endings.

But on May 8, 2007, I ended it.

I ended 'us.'

Not the story. But 'us.'

My journals then, and now, hold story after story after story. My experiences, my pains, my confusions, my desires, my memories. I do not believe I will ever become tired of writing about 'it.' Each time I write about 'it,' about 'us,' the story emerges uniquely... and I feel closer to myself. A self that I had forgotten about or that had never existed. A self that negotiates between a past that once was and a future that can become.

Some may say that by writing this story—a story that neither truly begins nor ends, yet is always beginning and ending—I am simply engaging in some neurotic fetish that keeps 'him' alive. Maybe it used to be that. Once upon a time. But not now. Not today. Rather, this act of

writing is one of my methods of dealing with and working through the (chronic) ‘trauma’ that I experienced, a trauma that I wish I could forget.²

Writing is part of my healing, my recovery.

This is not to say that the act of writing completely heals me from what happened. That would be too simple, too linear of an outcome. The process of healing is much more complex. In fact, the process is much more individual and more spiral, moving amongst temporal positions while often oscillating between feeling better and feeling worse.³ Writing has aided in my attempts to make sense of matters—while other times, it simply has been a silent cry, a hidden textual representation of my innermost pains, fears, and/or desires. Sometimes it has acted as a place that is ‘safer’ than speaking, ‘easier’ than verbal expressions, ‘closer’ to my ‘truth.’ Writing has been, and continues to be, therapeutic for me. It seems trite and overemotional to admit. But it is the truth; it is my truth. In short, it is a cathartic outlet, a creative craft, a method of self-expression that sometimes—but not always—leads to deeper awareness.

When I return to those journal entries, I sometimes cry. I wonder why I put up with it all, why I did not see how much this unhealthy relationship was affecting me. My body began to scream with medical conditions that were directly related to stress, anxiety, and depression. I did not recognize that these issues were symptomatic of what was going on psychologically... I did not see the correlation between my physical and psychological states. I was always too concerned with ‘him,’ with ‘us,’ with ignoring everything that was wrong. But these days, I no longer make excuses for him, for how he treated me, or for myself—as I did play a role in the matter. This does not mean that the thought of it all no longer hurts. It does. But it is a different

² Judith Herman explains that chronic trauma is “prolonged, repeated trauma” (86).

³ This oscillation is emphasized not only by trauma scholars such as Herman but also by authors who have experienced a trauma and have chosen to write about it. For example, author Gloria Anzaldúa notes, “...That’s what writing is for me, an endless cycle of making it worse, making it better, but always making meaning out of the experience, whatever it may be” (95). These ideas will be explored further in the upcoming chapters.

hurt. Nor does it mean that I have found closure. I have not. The only ‘closure’ is my accepting that I will never completely have it. In fact, I still occasionally turn to journaling, to writing about the many topics intertwined with this particular relationship, this rendezvous, this *trauma*. I write in attempts to understand why ‘it’ happened over and over and over for not just days or months, but years. Six years of my past.

This dissertation is not the story of *that* past, that trauma. Rather, it serves as a mere backdrop in order to explain how I began my spiral journey of better knowing, learning, and healing *myself* through creative (re)presentations of *my* story. It serves as a backdrop of how I work(ed) with and through my chaotic past in attempts to find structure and make meaning out of *my* trauma, a trauma that I recognize may not be as ‘severe’ as other ‘traumas’ comparatively. But it is mine. Furthermore, my personal disclosure serves as a backdrop to explain how, throughout the years, I have found that when trauma and writing *are* linked, words are more than words, and wounds are more than wounds. This is not just an abstract, poetic phrase. Rather, this is my way of saying that language, trauma, and creativity are layered; there are always multiple meanings and numerous complexities at play, especially when situating these issues within literary and academic discourses, when considering women writing about trauma.

“Trauma.” A word that I am more accustomed to these days. A word that links my personal past to my academic research. This was not a forced connection. It evolved organically, over time. In fact, I did not realize that these two worlds would one day collide. More so, I probably fought very hard to keep them entirely distinct from one another. In its own way, my studies at times even served as a false sense of safety—away from my realities, my traumatizing experiences that I did not want to admit to myself nor share with others. I sugarcoated portions, while ignoring others.

All the while, I wrote. For myself. With no intention of ever publishing my journals. But rather, I wrote with a *need* to write. And in its own way, this need as well as my personal (writing) experiences have led me to argue that there *are* therapeutic benefits of life-writing.

However, my specialty in this field did not emerge solely because of my personal connection to writing. Rather, a link between my personal life and my scholarly interests evolved over time. As an ever-developing scholar, I have been interested in writing processes, identity formations, diversity issues, and pedagogical theories, and these threads have unfolded in various ways, ranging across centuries, cultures, and disciplines, focusing on literary criticism, composition studies, and writing pedagogy. I have focused on the writer, marginality, authorial voice, and creative expression and have often gravitated to women writers, interrogating how difference and dominant structures affect processes of writing and performances of self. These threads are present in my research on life-writing as a form of healing—a field grounded in autobiographical studies and influenced by composition, psychoanalytic, and feminist theories.

This background is needed when ‘storying’ myself—as a person who has experienced a trauma, as an author who has chosen to write and publish about her trauma, and as a scholar who continues to study life-writing and the therapeutic benefits of ‘storying’ the self. To do so, I engage with other female authors who acknowledge the therapeutics of writing. When doing so, these women often write about both their inner struggles *and* their writing acts—noting how they work with and through their traumas by writing about them.

bell hooks is one such author. In her book titled *remembered rapture: the writer at work*, hooks describes the therapeutic benefits that she receives through her writing processes: “Writing, and the hope of writing, pulls me back from the edges of despair” (8). She, like many women authors, feels and acknowledges the connections among trauma, writing, and healing.

Sylvia Plath. Virginia Woolf. And Anaïs Nin. These are three women who come immediately to my mind, but there are others: Sylvia Fraser, Gloria Anzaldúa, Dorothy Allison, Louise DeSalvo, Maya Angelou, and Trinh Min-ha, to name a few. I offer this list as a sampling of the many voices, the many stories. Furthermore, I offer this list as evidence that trauma and women's acts of writing about their traumas occur across racial, cultural, sexual, class differences. Thus, I assert that women and their writing about their traumatic experiences unite women in a shared story—one that is made up of many stories, one that 'never really begins nor ends,' one that has been and continues to be juxtaposed against the predominately male-authored canon. Thus, women are un/consciously considered to be wounded as writers in addition to being wounded by their traumatic pasts.

This dissertation engages with trauma, writing, and healing. Specifically, I work with literary, feminist, and pedagogy studies to rewrite 'wounded' women as *healers*, as individuals whose writing aids in healing both themselves and others. And in a way, my dissertation *is* a story, and I am its teller.

So '[l]et me tell you a story. For all I have is a story...'

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ABSTRACT

This project reconceptualizes how women and their personal stories of trauma have been read and represented in literary, feminist, and pedagogical studies, asserting that these authors and their texts should be recognized respectively as *wounded healers* and *healing narratives*. By situating my study within links among trauma, women, and writing, I argue that women and their personal stories of trauma exist in marginal, or rather, wounded positions. I problematize scholarship where links among these three commonly emerge (namely psychoanalytic, autobiographical, and feminist fields) to challenge monolithic readings and re-write these women and texts as more than wounded. *More than Words, More than Wounds* focuses on writing acts and purposes, post-trauma, stressing life-writing as acts of agency and expressions of (feminine) creative movement—holding healing potentials. Throughout the chapters, I identify and move beyond negative connotations and tensions, arguing that Cixous's *l'écriture féminine* as well as multiplicities, ambiguities, and contradictions open opportunities for healing processes to emerge, post-trauma. Furthermore, I draw on scholars such as Herman and Anzaldúa to stress that writing the story is connected to healing the self, an act that is never-ending and requires interconnectedness. Such (re)writing acts move beyond repetition, spiraling to and promoting individual and communal healing while connecting personal stories to a shared social story of women, trauma, and healing. These claims are emphasized in the final chapter, where I engage with the limitations and possibilities of including such personal stories in English curricula. Contextualizing my claims within composition and pedagogical studies, I primarily draw on Nouwen's "wounded healer" concept to develop a *wounded healer pedagogy*, merging the personal, creative, and spiritual and contending that links between trauma and writing fosters self-awareness, interconnectedness, and a call of healing within and beyond the course.

1 INTRODUCTION

Trauma, from the Greek meaning 'wound,' refers to self-altering, even self-shattering experience of violence, injury, and harm. Crucial to the experience of trauma are the multiple difficulties that arise in trying to articulate it.
- Gilmore (6)⁴

Leigh Gilmore, author of *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony*, emphasizes that post-trauma individuals experience 'multiple difficulties...in trying to articulate [the trauma that they had experienced].' However, this one statement taken out of context can apply to literary, feminist, and pedagogical studies when engaging with texts by women about their traumas. In other words, '[c]rucial to the experience of trauma [within literary, feminist, and pedagogical discourses] are the multiple difficulties that arise in trying to articulate it.' The 'experience of trauma' to which I am referring is multiple itself—ranging from how psychoanalysts depict the 'traumatized' subject to how autobiographical and feminist scholars view writing acts about trauma to how these works of literature are represented and taught. Furthermore, these 'difficulties' develop simply because of linking *women* and *writing* and *trauma*. Terms that have many implications when combined. In essence, these implications that arise are due to the link between gender and genre, both existing in marginal positions within power structures, as well as the fact that trauma itself is, indeed, difficult to articulate.

General Overview

When women write and publish their traumas (the Greek word for wounds), they are publicly exposing their private selves. On one hand, this act blurs the well-known divide between private and public spheres, allowing women a method of voicing their stories and

⁴ Other scholars, such as Herman, Harris, and Henke, refer to such difficulties as well.

engaging in forms of *creative* resistance against social silence.⁵ However, on the other hand, it merely reinscribes women as being overly expressive, overly emotional, eternally wounded, and at times even unstable—all in comparison to their dominant (male) counterparts. In addition, historically, women and writing have a complex relationship in literary studies. Furthermore, life-writing (in general) is a complex genre, due to the many intricacies in regards to identity, truth, memory, and factual reality. These topics are further complicated when authors' life-writings include their traumas—events that lack complete consciousness, that cannot be fully articulated, and that affect both identity and memory.⁶

Thus, despite the literary emergence of female authors and their stories, I assert that women and their 'trauma narratives' continue to be marginalized, dismissed, or avoided due to the 'difficulties that arise' when women and writing and trauma are linked. Furthermore, when these narratives are considered, even feminist scholars often inadvertently reinforce gendered ideologies, a wound linked to the patriarchal nature of academic discourse, denying women writers complete agency, discounting the creative process, and discrediting writing acts as forms of healing. Thus, I acknowledge that attempts are made to move these narratives and their authors out of marginal positionings, but scholars' efforts fall short, relying on abstractions, clinging onto impossible definitive statements, and emphasizing writing acts as forms of resistance. As a byproduct, rhetorical situations are ignored, and creative, writing, and healing processes are sidelined. And women, and their stories, remain *wounded*. Wounded in their trauma. Wounded in academic discourse. Perceived by and because of these wounds.

⁵ I stress creative resistance, as I am against an insistence that such writing *only* 'resists' structures, language, positioning. This idea is explored in depth in chapter four.

⁶ I explore trauma and how it affect one's identity more in chapter two and engage with life-writing as a genre more in chapter three.

Through the chapters of this dissertation, I acknowledge the rhetorical situations around women writing trauma, and I attend to writing acts as forms of creativity, being three-fold (product, process, *and* person) while refusing to relegate these texts to literary analyses alone. My choice to focus on a gendered containment is not to minimize males' experiences or to essentialize women's.⁷ Rather, it is to disrupt what I label as trauma's accepted dominant story, a story that I view situates the concept of trauma in a masculine framework, which is explained more in depth later in this project. In addition, my focus on women allows me to explore some of the women writers who have inspired me, aiding in my own healing processes. By studying trauma and 'trauma narratives' by women, I intend to demonstrate that wounds are more than wounds and that words are more than words while stressing that stories have healing potentials.

These personal narratives are a part of the social story of women, trauma, and healing—individual and communal. These narratives demonstrate that we come to know, learn, and grow through language while insisting that we are interconnected, existing as relational beings, where our traumas, or 'wounds,' can affect others and vice versa. By engaging with these narratives through literary, feminist, and pedagogical studies, I redefine the genre of trauma narrative by analyzing its shortcomings and possibilities while illuminating a theoretical perspective based on the act and purposes of writing and sharing these stories. Specifically, I analyze the shortcomings of how these narratives have been read within these discourses—threading my research with psychoanalysis, autobiographical studies, feminist theories, and composition studies. To move beyond the shortcomings, this project draws on principles associated with therapeutic benefits of creative expression, to understand how trauma affects textual representations and how the processes and purposes of writing assist authors in redefining

⁷ To be (overly) explicit, my project's framework on women writers alone also serves as a gendered focus of trauma; however, I acknowledge that the intricacies and issues of trauma are larger than this gendered containment and not essentially female.

internalized identities. Such ideas stress life-writing as expressions of movement and acts of agency that restore individual and communal connections—while emphasizing writers’ roles as healers. Thus, *More than Words, More than Wounds* reconceptualizes life-writing and healing post-trauma, altering the way we not only perceive but also teach trauma narratives, allowing these texts and writers to be read respectively as healing narratives and wounded healers rather than simply as *wounded* women.

In essence, the goal of my project is to shift perspectives, transforming overt objectification of wounded women by acknowledging their identity formations, writing processes, and effects of their writing acts. Such a move conveys these women who experienced a trauma and decided to textually re-create the traumatizing experience in a positive light, highlighting them as active, creative, and poetic individuals who, post-trauma, focus on writing and healing potentials. Such a move views these women as active individuals who redefine their identities while simultaneously (re)writing their life-stories. Such a move identifies each unique story as part of a larger healing effort.

A Brief Outline

The next chapter, “More than Wounds: Women Writing Trauma,” positions literary studies as needing another story, one that refuses to directly and indirectly represent women and their stories as *wounded*, one that acknowledges creative acts as forms of agency for individual and communal healing purposes. To do so, I analyze historical backgrounds of trauma studies and psychoanalysis, offering evidence of how these fields foreground cultural understandings of definitions and assist in creating a dominant story of trauma, one that denies women complete agency and that metaphorically boxes them into past conceptions. Such sustains marginal positioning while focusing on the trauma itself, disempowering those affected and highlighting

the power of trauma—an occurrence that affects identity formations, overwhelms psyches, resurfaces repetitively, and exists in realms beyond language. I challenge this dominant story by interrogating trauma, connecting trauma more to the entire self (body, mind, and creative spirit) while expanding it by linking it to active, creative, healing processes.

Furthermore, in this chapter, I argue that women who have experienced traumas are wounded by not only the trauma but also the craft of writing, due to marginal gendered positions and objectified associations with only the wound or with a position of being, or having been, traumatized. I then turn to the psychoanalytic case of Anna O., asserting that she was indeed more than Freud's objectified, hysteric, traumatized patient, dependent upon him for healing. Rather, she was a woman, with her own name, her own story.⁸ More so, I contend that she was a woman who participated in and sustained her own healing efforts by actively producing, writing, self-expressing—becoming an author and healer, of self and others.

After explaining that an influx of women's stories emerged with the women's movement, chapter three, "Pandora's Box: Reconceptualizing the Problem of Writing (about) Trauma," situates the genre of trauma narratives as a "Pandora's box"—a metaphor that highlights topics of trauma and life-writing as being locked away, avoided, and unleashing the unwanted when opened.⁹ Furthermore, I assert that when trauma narratives are acknowledged, they are acknowledged under what may be construed as a masculine context, namely war, scientific diseases, and natural disasters—all topics that are more definable, more known, more easily boxed—continuing to avoid the more ambiguous, less containable stories of trauma (such as

⁸ Judith Herman notes that Bertha Pappenheim (Anna O.) wrote a play and translated a text, while I stress the act of her creation as healing (19).

⁹ I rely on Cinthia Gannett's *Gender and the Journal: Diaries and Academic Discourse* and her stance that life-writing, specifically the journal, is a sort of "Pandora's box" to argue that women have been and continue to be "wounded" within the craft of writing.

women's abuse and incest narratives). These matters continue to be "too much" to bear, marginalized and avoided.

I modify this notion of Pandora and her box by drawing from creative therapist Shaun McNiff and comparative literary scholar Vered Lev Kenaan respectively to return to an earlier interpretation of Pandora meaning "many things" and to embrace her as a rhetorical figure that represents "feminine beauty."¹⁰ Such a move contends that women writing their traumas better enables them to transgress their marginality, by engaging with the multiple, the ambiguous, the indefinable—the *pandoric* nature of writing their trauma. These claims are stressed by analyzing texts by Sylvia Fraser, a Canadian author who overtly references Pandora in her trauma stories.

Building upon the reconceptualization of Pandora, I now focus specifically on writing in the following chapter, "Feminine Creativity: Moving Beyond Wounds and Words." Here, I engage with Hélène Cixous's *l'écriture féminine* and its possibilities and limitations, arguing that writing is more than breaking and resisting; it is simultaneously linked to creating. Furthermore, I assert that *l'écriture féminine* is closer to trauma while enabling women writers to move beyond fixity, mediating between narrative and non-narrative. Such a claim ultimately expands on the pandoric nature of the story of trauma by analyzing feminine language and engaging with psychoanalysis, linking Lacan with Jung and creativity with femininity. I turn to Gloria Anzaldúa's text and her creation of the *mestiza consciousness* to support these claims. Using her text, I stress that this feminine stylistics focuses on moving, on creating anew post-trauma.

Chapter five, "'Let Me Tell You a Story': The Story as Healing," uses Dorothy Allison's text as an impetus to assert that acts of narrating the story of trauma are individual drives that are more than "compulsions to repeat"—as they are also based on a *need* to create and to heal. Such

¹⁰ Lev Kenaan explains "feminine beauty" existing within contradictions, being both visible and ambiguous, and in his text *Art Heals: How Creativity Cures the Soul*, McNiff explains that Pandora once meant "many things" but has morphed to be "too much" (86; 151).

ideas rely on arguing that writing the story is a *creative* act of expression that flows, that moves, that spirals. Furthermore, by linking literary criticism with creative therapists and theorists, I am able to intertwine writing processes and attend to an area that has been “too much” to delineate, while insisting that writing does not “fix,” does not “heal,” does not result in a “coherent” self—these concepts are too tidy, too conclusive. Rather, I recognize acts of writing trauma as movements that are never finalized, connected to creative flow, and always in a spiral process of healing. Such notions re-write the self who has been traumatized. Such notions re-write the once wounded as a *healer*. Such notions ultimately recognize women and their stories as more than wounds and words.

Chapter six, “More than Words: Healing Self and Others,” progresses to explain that these written texts hold healing potentials for *both* self and others, linking writing-writer-reader in one story. I primarily engage with bell hooks and Louise DeSalvo to explain that writing becomes a means of self re-invention post-trauma and re-establishing interconnectedness, stressing that no personal story exists on its own accord. I expand this to insist that stories are intimately linked, while drawing on Judith Herman to highlight the significance of relationships—as this is the crux of Herman’s third and final stage of recovery.

Directly connected is the idea of “bearing witness,” which I interrogate, rhetorically analyzing and arguing that this phrase focuses too much on both the wound and not enough on the role of the receiver, which lessens not only the new identity but also the very interconnectivity that individuals are trying to establish. I then offer an alternative, replacing this phrase with Christina Baldwin’s notion of “storycatching” to better sustain mutual interaction in narrating and healing processes while connecting to storytelling. I close the chapter stressing the

link to hope and love and asserting that my claims redefine, re-story these texts as “healing narratives” and these women as “wounded healers.”

The final chapter, “Healing (Narratives) in the Classroom: Writing in a ‘Wounded Healer’ Pedagogy,” synthesizes and extends my interrogation of literary and feminist studies to pedagogical studies. I do so by creating what I define as a *wounded healer pedagogy* and engaging with its implications. These final pages, drawing on Nouwen’s spiritual text *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society*, assert that teachers should include such texts by women who have experienced traumas in English curricula. The goal of such is layered: to highlight how personal and communal stories engage with healing processes, to stress the authors’ agency and overtly identifying these women as more than wounded, and to open up opportunities for classroom participants to experience and promote transformation. Such a stance requires that I situate myself within composition studies because these texts may instigate personal writing within classrooms. Thus, I analyze how personal writing has been viewed as a “problem,” a sort of “Pandora’s box,” for instructors and administrators, arguing that these tensions should be viewed as pandoric. After which, I turn to pedagogical concepts such as Pratt’s “contact zone” and Anzaldúa’s “borderland” to stress the benefit of pedagogies that are pandoric and that foster the personal and creative.

Building upon these and referencing Bhabha’s “third space,” I move beyond the personal and creative to encompass a spiritual element, specifically, a personal and communal call to engage and sustain healing while recognizing interconnectedness. Labeling this a *wounded healer pedagogy*, I primarily draw on Nouwen and refer to pedagogical scholars bell hooks and Mary Rose O’Reilly to outline this proposed pedagogy as fostering self-actualization, social

consciousness, and creating and learning anew—processes that are never-ending, processes that are predicated upon love, and processes that stress a social story of women, trauma, and healing.

The Writing and Healing Processes

These chapters, these tasks are not exactly linear—as they work individually *and* collectively, creating a whole, and sometimes even abstract, idea while relying upon the parts. Because of this, my individual chapters depend heavily on each other, to contribute to literary, feminist, and pedagogical studies—opening up possibilities for critics and teachers to interpret and teach women writers and their stories of trauma differently. Such a stance is not the sole alternative, but it is one story...

A story that I hope will spark discussions and work towards healing individual and communal pasts, presents, and futures.

Furthermore, my dissertation speaks to me and my personal story, a story that is itself part of a larger, cultural one. And I acknowledge that (re)writing it has strengthened my belief in the transformative art of sharing stories. To be true to this faith, I disperse some of my personal stories throughout the pages. Not many. And always applicable. Thus, the thread of ‘personal story’ takes on multiple layers within these pages. And my selected stories vary, in content and form. Some are more focused narratives while others are stream-of-consciousness—all written for this dissertation. And others are my personal journal entries, exposing and sharing my trauma as I had recorded it years ago. Including these was a bold decision, but the benefits, indeed, outweighed my concerns. To summarize, I claim the contribution is two-fold: to add depth and to disrupt linearity. Incorporating my personal voice is in line with the topics I explore and the claims I make, but it also allows one to understand better how I chose this topic, or rather, how this topic chose me. An added bonus is that it does play with narrative standards,

disrupting both textual linearity and readers' expectations while engaging with a feminine stylistic, a stylistic that I analyze and that is used beyond my personal stories, playing with standards. Thus, my writing stylistic is sometimes circular and sometimes repetitive, having a sort of spiraling aspect to it. This style is sometimes performed by re-stating the same phrase and is sometimes conveyed by using fragments and textual spacing. Furthermore, this writing style, even, at times includes contradictions—as feminine writing and healing efforts rely on both spirals and contradictions. Sometimes this style is conscious and creative; other times it reflects my organic writing process.

Including these varying stories, playing with form, and creating a sort of poetics work with my concepts—as my strongest declaration is that writing has healing capabilities. And I acknowledge that writing and creatively constructing this dissertation have further aided in my own healing efforts. Furthermore, these processes combined with my research have strengthened my stance that writing is creating is healing...

And such a stance re-writes any woman who writes her story of trauma. Thus, she is no longer a 'traumatized' individual hoping to (re)gain power over her past. *Rather*, she is a woman who shares her personal story, while remaining part of a larger story. And she is a woman who believes in hope and love, a woman who believes in healing. In short, she is a creative, active individual.

She is a writer. She is a creator.

But she is more...

She is a healer... a "wounded healer."

I am one of these women.

And my dissertation is but one of many stories.

2 MORE THAN WOUNDS: WOMEN WRITING TRAUMA

*You always have the pain,
So you might as well use it.
- Lorde (qtd in DeSalvo 12)*¹¹

Literary studies have seen an emergence of female authors throughout the recent decades, giving voice and literary space to women and many of their stories. However, personal trauma narratives by women remain *wounded* because of the complexities that are linked to women writing trauma. In this chapter, I set up some of the ‘difficulties that arise’ in literary studies when linking *women* and *writing* and *trauma*. To do so, I first develop a general understanding of trauma by offering a definition and exploring trauma as a concept, using trauma scholars such as Judith Herman and Cathy Caruth. After which, I provide background knowledge by exploring the intersections of these three key terms: trauma and writing, women and writing, and trauma and women. Throughout these sections, I analyze both psychoanalysis and feminist studies to explain how these fields foreground cultural understanding and create a dominant story, one that continues to stress women and their stories as wounded. Thus, by tracing the evolving concept of trauma and exploring the ‘difficulties’ associated to *trauma and writing*, to *women and writing*, and to *trauma and women*, I am able to situate literary discourses as needing another story, one that refuses to stress the wounds in lieu of women’s writing acts and purposes, one that reconceptualizes *women writing trauma* as being more than their wounds, more than the traumas that become static in the textualized, published stories.

Ultimately, this chapter challenges a dominant story that highlights women as being wounded. Throughout the pages, I argue women who have experienced traumas are wounded by the trauma and within their writing, marginalized by their gendered positionings and identified

¹¹ When citation is DeSalvo, assume I am referring to her critical text *Writing as a Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives*, unless noted otherwise.

by the trauma, a concept that affects both body and mind. However, I claim such a depiction of trauma neglects to consider the individual's *creative spirit*—something that should be considered when re-envisioning women writers and their trauma stories. To highlight these claims, I turn to the well-known psychoanalytic case of Anna O., asserting she was more than Freud's objectified, nameless hysteric, forever traumatized. Rather, she was a woman with a name; she was a woman with a story. And by recognizing stories such as hers, I assert that literary discourses will better recognize women as active and creative individuals engaged in their writing processes and healing purposes. Thus, this chapter, in essence, insists that as long as texts and/or authors are viewed as being *just* wounded accounts of what occurred, static and traumatized, writing and healing processes and purposes will not be highlighted. When this happens, we, as a society, literally and metaphorically remain stuck in the past, and women writers remain stuck in the past, stuck in the trauma, unable to redefine, rewrite themselves post-trauma.

Definitions of Trauma

What is meant by the term 'trauma'? Does the term 'trauma' refer to collective traumas such as historical wars or social epidemics? Or does it refer more to individual traumas, and if so, what becomes classified as 'individual trauma'? Does it refer to medical conditions or surgical mishaps? Or is it physical acts of violence against individuals, such as rape? If 'trauma' falls into the category of being a medical condition, then does one consider the psychological effect of the diagnosis as the 'individual trauma,' or does one classify the *actual* physical, medical condition as the trauma?

These represent just a few of the questions that can emerge when attempting to define 'trauma'—a term that is vital to understand when speaking about women and their *traumas* as well as when classifying women as wounded in both social and literary histories. Thus, I ask the

above questions to acknowledge that the term itself is ambiguous and arbitrary. Such questions, such ‘either/or’ possibilities are needed to recognize and accept the variations of the term.

Furthermore, they also establish a basis when delineating past and present perceptions of and about the many ‘traumas’ that do exist, the many ‘trauma stories’ that do influence the larger story of trauma.

According to Cathy Caruth, author of *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, “[T]he Greek *trauma*, or ‘wound,’ [originally refers] to an injury inflicted on a body” (3). Such a definition would imply that ‘trauma’ would be the physical wound ‘inflicted upon [the] body,’ ignoring all emotional changes that occur in the psyche as a result. In other words, it would not consider the fear that arises because of the unknown future or the uneasiness that accompanies trying to accept the ‘trauma’ while maintaining the ‘self’ pre-trauma.¹² It would not consider the stress that may develop with relationships because of the ‘trauma’ or the struggles that coincide when trying just to live day-to-day without constantly thinking of this ‘trauma.’ No. There is no room for these ‘trauma’ stories, these sufferings to emerge according to this original definition.

But even this original definition is unstable, having its own variations and extensions depending on usage. For example, in *Trauma: A Genealogy*, Ruth Leys explains, “Trauma was originally the term for a surgical wound” (19). This particular explanation stresses that the source of the ‘trauma’ is not just a physical condition, but rather, it is a ‘surgical wound.’ Such a phrase implies that ‘trauma’ was/is more than ‘an injury inflicted upon a body’; it suggests that the cause of the wound was/is medical, or to be more precise, ‘surgical.’ However, Caruth’s definition leaves the source open, allowing one’s imagination to fill in the blank. Thus, the

¹² I should note that my statement does not mean to imply that one *can* maintain the ‘self’ as it existed pre-trauma—merely there is often a desire to do so.

‘injury’ *could* be a result of a ‘surgical’ procedure, but the ‘injury’ is not limited to such and very easily could be an act of violence by a stranger, or even a self-inflicted injury. I stress these ambiguities to situate ‘trauma’ better as a concept and to emphasize that there are complexities and (rhetorical) implications intertwined when language is involved. There always are. Even within what appears to be a simple definition.

Despite their distinctions, the above two definitions by Caruth and Leys share the same general idea, which is the fact that ‘trauma’ was first represented as a physical act on the *body*. Such a focus on the physicality obviously projects attention to the body and ignores a full examination of one’s ‘self’ (as it is affected by trauma). However, as times progressed, studies began to expand the interpretation of the ‘self’ and the effects of ‘trauma,’ moving past the corporal and taking one’s *mind* into account: “In its later usage, particularly in the medical and psychiatric literature, and most centrally in Freud’s text, the term *trauma* is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body *but upon the mind*” (Caruth 3, my emphasis). Thus, the study and concept of ‘trauma’ moved from the body to the mind, revealing that it can *and does* encompass more than the body. Specifically, it evolved to encompass psychological trauma.

Such psychological trauma is the foundation of what I mean when I refer to trauma. However, it may also encompass a physical element, as psychological trauma may be the result of physical harm done to the body or may even result in physical symptoms. Thus, I draw on Caruth and Leys to argue that relating trauma to only the body and the mind excludes an important aspect of the self—the spirit. Such affects my interpretation. To specify, for the purpose of this project, I define trauma as a psychological wound that affects one’s sense of ‘self’—body, mind, and *creative spirit*. I assert that the entire self consists of such a triad—aligning myself with theorists such as bell hooks and Trinh Min-ha, whose concepts rely on the

holistic inclusion of the spirit as well as body and mind. This depiction of a holistic self serves as the framework of this project; however, I acknowledge that such an idea of the self consisting of mind, body, and spirit may, at times, seem at odds with my stance that identities exist in multiplicities. Thus, I highlight that boundaries of finites are porous and that these entities are far from static. Furthermore, my focus on *creative* spirit opens up opportunities to intersect writing and creating with healing.¹³ In addition, I engage primarily with stories based on personal traumas, interchanging the term ‘traumas’ with ‘wounds’ and ‘personal pains,’ and sometimes simply with ‘pains.’ In short, I understand trauma as an overwhelming occurrence, one that overpowers one’s sense of self.

Trauma and Self-Development

Peter Levine and Maggie Kline define trauma as “the antithesis of empowerment” (4).¹⁴ I expand this definition to foreground trauma as seemingly *holding* power over one’s self-development. Overwhelming the individual. Affecting the psyche. So much, that the presence of the trauma, well after the trauma has ceased, remains evident. Ever-present. Overpowering and repetitively ‘wounding’ the ‘self.’

To understand how trauma impairs self-development, I first acknowledge that the effects of trauma, which disrupt how one views and is viewed, do not exist in absolutes. Even Levine and Ann Frederick, co-authors of *Waking the Tiger, Healing Trauma: The Innate Capacity to Transform Overwhelming Experiences*, are quick to point out that there is an individual nature (and affect) of ‘trauma.’ Thus, they write, “[I]t would be a prohibitive task to compile a

¹³ Refer to J. Cameron’s *Walking in This World: The Practical Art of Creativity* to expand the links between creativity and spirituality. Furthermore, other scholars such as Barbara Ganim (in her text *Art and Healing: Using Expressive Art to Heal Your Body, Mind, and Spirit*) acknowledge this self as existing within this triad. Thus, my assertion extends my interdisciplinary research, further developing connections among literary and creative expressive fields.

¹⁴ Although this citation is extracted from Levine and Kline’s text *Trauma Through a Child’s Eyes: Awakening the Ordinary Miracle of Healing, Infancy through Adolescence*, which refers to specific ages, the content remains applicable for understanding the concept of trauma and self-development.

complete list of every known trauma symptom” (147). Their compilation of symptoms refuses to summarize trauma completely, but it does provide insight, offering a number of possible symptoms. Some of these include hyperarousal, dissociation (including denial), feelings of helplessness, hypervigilance, intrusive imagery or flashbacks, hyperactivity, exaggerated emotional and startle responses, nightmares and night terrors, abrupt mood swings, shame, reduced ability to deal with stress, and difficulty sleeping (Levine and Frederick 147).¹⁵

Levine and Frederick argue that trauma affects self-development to such an extent that symptoms may develop long after the actual trauma had occurred. They term these as “traumatic after-effects [which] are not always apparent immediately following the incidents that caused them” (Levine and Frederick 45). Rather, they—like the trauma itself—may be delayed, deferred, denied. It may be months, years, decades before they surface. The reasons for such are far and varied.

Thus, the above symptoms are classified as initial symptoms, and Levine and Frederick assert that there should be another list to represent effects that (may) develop over time. And the symptoms that develop depend on both the trauma and the individual (‘self’). Some possible symptoms include “panic attacks, mental ‘blankness’ ... avoidance behavior ... excessive shyness ... inability to make commitments ... chronic fatigue ... psychosomatic illnesses ... depression ... forgetfulness ... inability to love, nurture, or bond with other individuals...” (Levine and Frederick 148-149).

In addition to having after-effects, there are strong possibilities that even acknowledging the ‘trauma’ as a ‘trauma’ and even remembering the traumatic events may be postponed. A common explanation is simply the notion that the psyche is self-preserving and has an innate

¹⁵ This list is extended in their text, but the selected are word-for-word.

defense mechanism in attempts to protect itself from the power of the trauma, an event that is too traumatic to acknowledge, too traumatic to admit.

However, trauma affects the ‘self,’ surfacing and re-surfacing, through symptoms and memories, and the individual who experienced the trauma has little control. Herman explains that “nightmares, persistent flashbacks, and extreme reactions” are present, and she extends this to note that “[c]hronically traumatized people no longer have any baseline state of physical calm or comfort” (87, 96). She continues, “Over time, they perceive their bodies have turned against them. They begin to complain, not only of insomnia and agitation, but also numerous types of somatic symptoms. Tension headaches, gastrointestinal disturbances, and abdominal, back, or pelvic pain are extremely common” (Herman 86). Regardless of the focus, it is evident that the ‘trauma’ has the power to disturb severely both mental and physical realms of one’s ‘self.’

Gastrointestinal disturbances.

Abdominal pain.

Those were two of my symptoms.

I had others, but reading Herman’s words made me cry. It was as if someone found this missing piece of the puzzle. Never had I even considered that my (chronic) trauma had been the cause of my physical discomfort. In fact, at that time, I had not even realized that my experiences were traumatic.

I threw up.

I bloated up.

I doubled over in pain.

I went to doctors, had ultrasounds, changed eating habits, switched birth control.

Nothing. The specialist whom I was seeing had me on a different medicine (what seemed like)

every other week. She even put me on a mild antidepressant to try to calm my nerves. I remember her asking me if I had experienced a divorce or any other dramatic change. No. I remember her asking if I had been depressed. No, I don't think so.

Looking back, I am not so sure. I was never medically diagnosed with depression, but I now acknowledge that I had symptoms. And, back then, I even wanted to see a therapist. I would call, ask questions. I flirted with the idea. But never actually went. At times, I truly wanted to make an appointment, but the thought of burdening someone with my pains, the thought of even verbalizing them, fully acknowledging them... petrified me.

Decisions were difficult. Even the smallest decisions were overwhelming. I was at a store, trying to decide on what article of clothing to buy. Hardly a life-changing decision. But I couldn't decide. My throat closed up. I couldn't breathe. I had to get out. Dropping what I had in my hands, I hurried to my car, fighting desperately to hold back the tears.

My first anxiety attack. Or rather, the first that I now recognize as such. I probably had had them before, but for whatever reason, this one remains locked in my memory. That was years ago. And I am sure that the intensity was mild, considering what some people may experience. I am not discrediting my story, merely stating that I feel as if matters could have been a lot worse than they were. Furthermore, I would venture to say that the attacks have ceased completely, that my moments of panic are over.¹⁶ I cannot think of the last time that I had one. I take that back. I have had moments of intense crying. Are these anxiety attacks?

More like emotional attacks.

But even these episodes are far and few.

And are more controllable.

Now.

¹⁶ Or they were. Since writing this story, I have had other attacks.

I have woken up several times in the middle of the night from vivid dreams. Dreams that may play scenes exactly as I re-member them to have happened; dreams that may create completely fictitious storylines.¹⁷ But dreams that result in extreme emotions. Such associations do not always occur at night. In fact, they resurface from time to time. At the weirdest moments. In the oddest places. Sparked by the strangest images, sounds, sensations. Just this past week, while getting a pedicure, I was brought back to a memory. It was the way he touched my foot. My core tightened; I wanted to cry. I didn't. But wanted to. However, living with flashbacks—and knowing what they are and how they can affect me—has better allowed me to depend on logic, rationalizing the episode and distancing myself from its emotional effects.

I reiterate that trauma affects the 'self'—long after the trauma has ceased.

What may have been one traumatic second may result in lifelong consequences, having impacted the individual's self-development and internalized interpretations of one's self. As Leigh Gilmore asserts, "Trauma, from the Greek meaning 'wound,' refers to *self*-altering, even *self*-shattering experience of violence, injury, and harm" (6, my emphasis). Building upon Gilmore's words, which stress the idea that traumatic events *change* the self, I insist that the 'self' remains *wounded* because of the past trauma that lingers in the individual's present and affects the individual's future. But the 'self' is simultaneously *more than* wounded.

Trauma and Repetition

Leigh Gilmore conceptualizes a temporal tension when explaining trauma, explaining that there is no, or little, distinction among the three: "Trauma cleaves time into past and future

¹⁷ The idea of "re-membering" was brought to my attention in Helen Lock's article titled "'Building Up from Fragments': The Oral Memory Process in Some Recent African-American Written Narratives," where she explains that Morrison created the word to play with the idea "that to 're-member' something is to perform the act of reassembling its members, thus, stressing the importance to the memory process of creativity reconstruction" (299-300). (In *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction* [Third Edition]. Eds Michael J. Hoffman and Patrick D. Murphey. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005: 297-309.)

in such a way that both coexist in the present” (93). Charles M. Anderson and Marian M. MacCurdy explain a similar idea, stating that “[t]rauma events, because they do not occur within the parameters of ‘normal’ reality, do not fit into the structure and flow of time” (6).¹⁸ In other words, trauma cannot be boxed into an event that occurred in the past, *and* more importantly, traumatic events and the memory of these events affect one’s awareness of and judgment among past, present, and future. Thus, trauma affects one’s reality and temporality, being an event that is not a complete part of one’s past, present, or future, but remains simultaneously a part of all three, refusing to be boxed away as an inaccessible past. Furthermore, the blurring of the temporal also disrupts past formed identity characteristics and relational bonds. It is as if “[t]rauma forces the survivor to relive all her earlier struggles over autonomy, initiative, competence, identity, and intimacy” (Herman 52). Thus, an individual who has experienced a trauma suffers because her sense of self-development is propelled back to an earlier state, only more damaged and more vulnerable, more wounded. Thus, the trauma never truly leaves the individual:

Long after the danger is past, traumatized people relive the event as though it were *continually recurring* in the present. They cannot resume the normal course of their lives, for the trauma *repeatedly* interrupts. It is as if time stops at the moment of trauma...Small, seemingly insignificant reminders can also evoke these memories, which often *return* with all the vividness and emotional force of the original event (Herman 37, my emphasis).

It is evident that individuals who have been traumatized often undergo altered states that affect temporality, memories, and reality. In addition, memories of trauma can recur with the intensity

¹⁸ Charles M. Anderson and Marian M. MacCurdy co-edited collection titled *Healing and Writing: Toward an Informed Practice* offers a compilation of essays dedication to linking writing and healing, which speaks about the links between writing and healing while also acknowledging how trauma may affect one’s development.

of the initial trauma, but even that trauma remains blocked from individuals' complete understanding, according to many scholars, such as Caruth (4).

Cathy Caruth puts it best when she explains that trauma, according to Freud, holds power over its 'victims' because it 'is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known':

But what seems to be suggested by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is that the wound of the mind—the breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world—is not, like the wound of the body, a simple healable event, but rather an event that...is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to the consciousness until it imposes itself again, *repeatedly*, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor (4, my emphasis).

Caruth engages with what Freud would refer to as “compulsion to repeat,” a symptom that holds “the characteristic of repeatedly bringing [the traumatized] back into the situation of [the trauma]” (25, 11).¹⁹ Herman, too, refers to this symptom, calling it “repetitive intrusion” (37, my emphasis). But it could very easily be explained, simply by returning to a definition of trauma, which in both German and English, refers to “the *repeated* infliction of a wound” (Caruth 3).

Caruth argues that ‘trauma’ is such a shock to the ‘self’ that it is not experienced until it is re-experienced, stressing the repetitive nature of it all:

The historical power of trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all. And it is this inherent latency [which is the period during which the effects of the experience are not apparent] of the event that paradoxically explains the peculiar, temporal structure, the belatedness (17).

¹⁹ Hereafter, Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* text will be labeled as *BTPP*.

These words stress that there is a delay with the effects, and even with one's memory. The 'trauma' (because it is so powerful, so out of the ordinary realm of 'normal' experiences) remains latent, but has the 'power' to manifest itself when individuals least expect it, disrupting the definition of the 'self' as well as individual's temporal 'self' positioning. And, thus, 'trauma' holds the 'power' to change, to affect the very definition of self, *repetitively*. By nature of these ideas, I assert that 'trauma' not only holds the position of power but also simultaneously removes 'power' from the 'self' while affecting an individual's 'trauma stories.'

Trauma and Re-Enactment

Unable to accept loss of control during traumatic moments, individuals (re)imagine the events, the sequences—either hoping for a different ending or imagining one. Whatever the reason, it remains evident that part of repetition is re-enactment. As Herman explains, those who have experienced a trauma “relive the moment of trauma not only in their thoughts and dreams but also in their actions [by reenactment]” (39). She continues, “[People] feel compelled to re-create the moment of terror, either in literal or in disguised form. Sometimes people reenact the traumatic moment with a fantasy of changing the outcome” (Herman 39).

Leigh Gilmore is correct to claim that “[t]he power of trauma to outlast the duration of its infliction is crucial to the sense of wounding that makes the term so resonant” (27). She further explains that there is a “double meaning of trauma...[which] may signify either a new wound or the reopening of an old wound. The relation between the wounds, and the extent to which trauma can be understood as repetition, raises an important question: where does harm done in the past end?” (27). These couple of sentences and questions engage with the 'power' of 'trauma' in relation to the 'self' in order to question the obvious: Where does it end?

And I would even ask when and how does it end?

Or rather, is an end even possible?

Re-enacting a wound has the potential to wound.

Furthermore, I reiterate Caruth's words to stress that the re-enactment may be the first time that the individual actually experiences the trauma: "The historical power of trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all" (17). Keeping this in mind, it is no wonder that Herman recognizes that fantasized re-enactments are not always healthy encounters and can cause more harm than good.²⁰

In addition, what happened eludes the consciousness, cannot be completely remembered, no matter the number of times that individuals repeat, no matter the number of ways that individuals re-member the trauma. Thus, I contend that 'trauma stories' will be associated with the wounds, the trauma, and as a result, when trauma and writing are linked in literary, feminist, and pedagogical studies, the *wound* remains a vital component, a primary focus. Although the wound will remain part of the 'self,' again, I stress that the 'self' is more than wounded.

Trauma and Writing

The inability to recognize, to fully experience trauma complicates matters regarding trauma and writing, as writers who choose to textualize their traumas are not just reliving the experience they are attempting to forget, but they are articulating a past event that exists in a different realm of the consciousness and that is not quite 'experienced' during the act.²¹

Such articulations are further complicated by the idea that trauma can never fully be grasped; thus, individuals who have experienced a trauma and write about it cannot depict an exact account. Furthermore, those who have been traumatized are drawn to repeat the trauma,

²⁰ Herman notes further, "In their attempts to undo the traumatic moment, survivors may even put themselves at risk of further harm" (39).

²¹ Consciousness is explained further in chapter four.

but they also oscillate between remembering and forgetting the trauma, between wanting to reveal and trying to conceal the trauma.²² Such repetition and back-and-forth access to memories hold the potential to affect the number of stories—and the version that is told as it relates to the drive at the time of disclosure.

In addition, one must acknowledge that this drive is accompanied with a lack of structure, a lack of language: “Traumatic memories lack verbal narrative and context...[and are rather] encoded in the form of vivid sensations and images” (Herman 38). Thus, it is often proclaimed that the memory as it relates to trauma is not decipherable, not linear, not complete: “Traumatic memories focus on fragments rather than narratives” (MacCurdy 166).²³ T. R. Johnson emphasizes the fragmentation of these fixed images and sensations by explaining that a traumatic memory “breaks spontaneously into consciousness, both as flashbacks during waking states and as traumatic nightmares during sleep...the traumatic memory takes the form of an *idée fixe*—an assemblage of vivid sensations that insistently and spontaneously intrude on the fabric of ordinary consciousness” (89).²⁴ This statement further situates the ‘trauma’ as well as the memory of the ‘trauma’ as transcending ‘the fabric of ordinary consciousness,’ existing outside the ordinary memories that the ‘self’ has, existing somewhere other than the consciousness, and spiraling back into reality from time to time.

To complicate links between trauma and writing further, trauma is often identified as a jolt of terror that exceeds individuals’ verbal ability. Therefore, not only are the memories stored beyond an individual’s consciousness, and in fragments, but also, the act of trauma itself often is

²² Feminist scholarship often refers to a notion of revealing/concealing, but such a phrase is layered when trauma is intertwined.

²³ Marian M. MacCurdy’s article “From Trauma to Writing: A Therapeutic Model for Practical Use” acknowledges the difficulties of narrating trauma due to such fragments while highlighting benefits of such narration.

²⁴ T. R. Johnson engages with Herman, who also uses this term, which is originally associated with hysterical patients, who were “dominated by an ‘*idée fixe*’” (37).

associated to silencing, resulting in a lack of language.²⁵ In other words, during moments of trauma, language often escapes the victim. In the article titled “Troping Trauma: Conceiving (of) Experiences as Speechless Terror,” Rosemary (Gates) Winslow affirms that trauma is accompanied with the inability to speak, with a lack of language: “A traumatic experience is one of ‘speechless terror’” (621). Thus, the unspeakable act, meaning unconceivable, is often described as literally being an unspeakable act, meaning without verbal language.

Thus, writing trauma is complicated simply because articulating the trauma, in general, is complex. However, writing trauma is *more* layered because the act of writing is not always simple for those who have experienced a trauma. Due to psychological efforts to block the event from further harming their self-development, individuals who have experienced a trauma may attempt to avoid the memory and any sensation that brings the memory (back) to consciousness. However, when individuals write about trauma, they are no longer in denial, no longer dissociated from the event. As Marian M. MacCurdy affirms, “[The process of writing] necessitates re-experiencing the emotions associated with the experience, something most survivors have carefully avoided just to cope with life” (172). But “[t]raumatized people are often caught in the double bind of calling attention to the existence of some secret while simultaneously trying to protect themselves by deflecting attention away from it,” as Judith Harris highlights in *Signifying Pain: Constructing and Healing the Self through Writing* (21).²⁶ Thus, the paradoxical avoidance of the trauma and the desire to expose what had occurred are often behind trauma-writing.

²⁵ For example, victims of child abuse use play to ‘speak’ their past experiences. As Herman writes, “[children in abusive environments] speak in a disguised language too terrible for words” (96). In addition, Herman notes that there is a tension at play with trauma: “The conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialect of psychological trauma” (1).

²⁶ I dislike using the phrase ‘traumatized person/people’ simply because it implies that the person is ‘traumatized.’ Instead, I prefer to use phrases such as a ‘person who has experienced a trauma’ or ‘people with past traumas.’

These factors can make the act of writing past wounds a painful and exhausting encounter. This was confirmed in research studies led by James W. Pennebaker. In his article titled “Self-Expressive Writing: Implications for Health, Education, and Welfare,” he notes, “Those who write about their emotions and thoughts report feeling tired and somewhat depressed immediately after writing” (161). Layer all of this with the possibility that repetitive re-enactments of any nature (spoken, pictorial, textual) may be un/consciously fictionalized in attempts to understand or alter the trauma that occurred. In other words, even the very memory (and thus writing of the traumatic experience) may be called into question due to the damage done to the self and to the un/conscious blocking of the event. Thus, it is no wonder that accuracy is questioned. As Gilmore notes, “[T]rauma narratives often draw skepticism more readily than sympathy because they expose the conflict between identification and representativeness” (22).

It is obvious that writing trauma is difficult and that questions would naturally arise.

How can the articulations of the trauma be accurate,
be factual?

How then can written versions of the traumatic experiences depict the past,
exactly as it had happened to the authors?

The simple answer is this: They cannot.

And when they are expected to represent the exact past as it happened, written versions of these traumatic experiences are wounded, impaired by being tasked with the impossible.

But individuals write.

Women write.

They write their stories.

They write their traumas.

They write themselves.

Women and Writing

Despite the fact that the link between women and writing has historically been one of ‘dis-ease’ and ‘disease,’ women writers have always existed.²⁷ Albeit in complex positionings. There is no denying that they were marginalized, oppressed, and (as I assert) even *wounded* in their craft. *But* they have always written. In some form or fashion. In some voice. Negotiating their tensions between what was publically accepted and personally desired. I assert that to understand better women who write about trauma, one must understand better the historical relationship between women and writing.

Female authors, in general, can be traced back to times of antiquity, becoming more visible in the seventeenth century. This era brought a larger link between women and writing, and women became associated with letters, poetry, translations, and salons—essentially, women shared their work in specific genres and among intimate friends, because *that* was acceptable for the female gender.²⁸ Furthermore, the nineteenth-century saw texts such as Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*, which blurred fact and fiction while becoming the impetus for the well-known association of relegating women to the attic.

Thus, it is obvious that indeed women wrote.

²⁷ Refer to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination*.

²⁸ One example of a woman who mediated her writing acts with her gendered position is Katherine Philips, a seventeenth-century writer. Elsewhere, I have argued that Philips cleverly negotiates her gender positioning and desire to write original content in a public forum by translating a French play—because this genre was acceptable for her gender. However, she moves beyond translation, adding her own creative twist. Between the acts, Philips writes songs, which I view as a rhetorical move to *write*, in addition to translating, mediating an acceptable, public genre while simultaneously pushing the boundaries to include original text. (“Singing Her Praises: Fashioning Philips’s Femininity.” At Midwest Modern Language Association, Chicago, IL: Nov. 9-12, 2006.)

Despite social positionings.

And often within gendered expectations.

But always in comparison to her dominant counterpart.

As Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar assert in their well-known text, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination*, “Unlike her male counterpart...the female artist must first struggle against the effects of socialization” (49). Indeed, there is no denying that historically speaking, women do exist in an inferior position when compared to their dominant, male counterparts, *and* there is no denying that women writers have been barred from the mainstream literary discourse, negotiating their roles and desires to write. Some more than others. But a woman writer has always existed in comparison to her dominant counterpart, “confront[ing] precursors who are almost exclusively male, and therefore significantly different from her” (Gilbert and Gubar 48).

Such ‘difference’ is not simply ‘difference.’ As Michèle Barrett explains, “[G]ender means ‘not simply “difference,” but division, oppression, inequality, interiorized inferiority for women”’ (Worthington 108).²⁹ This results in an internalized identity that places a woman in an inferior role, feeling as a lesser person *and* a lesser author, if she claims being an author at all. Thus, women often acknowledged that the act of writing was not an act for their gender. For example, poetess Katherine Philips recognized this tension in a letter to Sir Charles Cotterell, where “she painfully concluded that poetry is ‘a Diversion so unfit for the Sex to which [she] belong, that [she was] about to resolve against it forever.’”³⁰

²⁹ To clarify, Kim L. Worthington, in *Self as Narrative: Subjectivity and Community in Contemporary Fiction*, is engaging with Barrett here. When considering the topic of difference, Trinh Min-ha’s text would prove beneficial.

³⁰ This citation is quoted in Brashear. (Lucy Brashear. “The Forgotten Legacy of the ‘Matchless Orinda.’” *Anglo-Welsh Review*, vol.65 [1979]: 68-76).

Women and writing were two entities that did not merge without tensions, as they were expected to uphold the extreme stereotype of being women of virtue. To elaborate, a female was thought of as fragile, meek, passive, one who was expected to maintain her subordinate position as an object in a male-dominated world. Such depictions of femininity are often linked with the Angel in the House.³¹ Virginia Woolf defines this Angel in the House figure in her book entitled *A Room of One's Own*, one of the most influential texts in feminist literary criticism:

[The Angel in the House] was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily...[S]he was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others...And directly I came to write I encountered her with the very first words...Directly...I took my pen in my hand...she slipped behind me and whispered: 'My dear, you are a young woman...Be sympathetic; be tender; flatter; deceive; use all the arts and wiles of our sex. Never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own' (qtd in Robbins 53).

For Woolf, a woman's gender influenced how she should and should *not* write. Woolf elaborates, "The human race is split up for [a woman] into two parties. Men are the 'opposing faction'; men are hated and feared, because they have the power to bar her way to what she wants to do—which is to write" (55, 58).³² Thus, men and their man-made style of writing bar the woman writer, wounding her from and in her desire to write. Indeed, cultural conditions and sexual inequalities and masculine traditions all bar her, the female writer, from writing.

³¹ According to Ruth Robbins, the phrase 'Angel in the House' comes from Coventry Patmore's poem and conveys idealized femininity (52-53).

³² Virginia Woolf's 1929 text titled *A Room of One's Own* shall be *AROOO* hereafter. In this particular book, Woolf explains her concept of the "masculine complex" and focuses "not so much that *she* shall be inferior as that *he* shall be superior, which plants him wherever one looks in the front of the arts" (55). Woolf continues to explain that a historical trace of female authors would result in "empty shelves" (55). However, I disagree as women did write—despite the lack of recognition and multiplicity. Therefore, literary shelves may have been sparse, but this does not reflect an accurate depiction of what was being produced.

But yet, the female writer writes.

They have always written.

Within a society and a language that are predicated upon patriarchy.

As Gilbert and Gubar emphasize, “Not only do these precursors incarnate patriarchal authority...they attempt to enclose her in definitions of her person and her potential which, by reducing her to extreme stereotypes (angel/monster) drastically conflict with her own sense of self—that is, of her subjectivity, her autonomy, her creativity” (48).³³ These factors affect women and their writing. Appropriating Bloom’s “anxiety of influence” phrase, a phrase that is attributed to male authors, Gilbert and Gubar argue that women have a “radical fear that she *cannot create*,” referring to this fear as an “anxiety of authorship” (49, my emphasis). They elaborate, “Handed down not from one woman to another but from the stern literary ‘fathers’ of patriarchy to all their ‘inferiorized’ female descendents, it is in many ways the germ of dis-ease or, at any rate, a disaffection, a disturbance, a distrust that spreads like a stain throughout the style and structure of much literature by women” (51).³⁴

Thus, women were wounded.

Wounded by the dominant structure of gender.

Wounded in/by the craft of writing.

Gilbert and Gubar situate writing as “disease” and highlight that earlier women writers “confess[ed] that they thought it might actually be mad of them to want to attempt the pen”

³³ Gilbert and Gubar further explain that male authors represented women as angels: “The ideal woman that male authors dream of generating is always an angel” (20). Robbins asserts that feminist studies began “as a critique of stereotypical images of femininity that literary texts present,” revealing representations of extremes (50-51). Thus, feminist theory began looking at text *about* women, not *by* them, or rather, ‘andro-texts’ by male authors; however, it progressed to included ‘gyno-texts’ by women authors (Robbins 70-71). Such alteration of focus is commonly attributed to Showalter and her book *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1977), but feminism and its focus had its faults, essentializing the female gender (Robbins 70-71).

³⁴ Their critique further explains that women writers of earlier centuries lacked foremothers, “struggle[ing] in [an] isolation that felt like illness, alienation that felt like madness, obscurity that felt like paralysis...” (51). Thus, they stress there was both a dis-ease and disease associated with women writing.

and/or “indicate[d] that they felt in some sense apologetic about such a ‘presumptuous’ pastime” (61). Thus, male authors not only represented women as ‘mad,’ but women writers internalized these extremes while distancing themselves from the act of authoring texts, linking themselves and their writing to madness. Indeed, such public displays of self-effacement may have been performed, conscious efforts to hold onto the angelic, virtuous identity of femininity. However, dismissing this as mere performance of identity, rather than an internalized sentiment, does not resolve anything—as such merely highlights the fact that women writers, through social constructions and gendered ideologies, *felt a need* to perform, to acknowledge the wound that was blatantly obvious.

Furthermore, “women who did not apologize for their literary efforts were defined as mad and monstrous: freakish because ‘unsexed’ or freakish because sexually ‘fallen’” (63). In addition, women writers ‘unsexed’ themselves when publishing often by using pseudonyms. Deborah Cameron elaborates on this in her edited collection:

[M]any women in the nineteenth century adopted male pen names to ensure their work would receive serious critical attention, and to escape the charge of coarseness or indecency... Women writers have faced a double bind: their work could be criticized as ‘unfeminine’ or, conversely, as ‘too feminine,’ not the work of a ‘real’ writer but merely of a ‘woman writer’ (7).

And Trinh expands this to triple-bind, including women writers of color (28). Thus, there is no denying that women writers were wounded before they wrote and wounded after they wrote.

In addition, they were wounded while they wrote. This statement is predicated upon the tensions between women and writing as they relate to language itself. After all, women had been

‘silenced’ and ‘silent’ for centuries.³⁵ Cameron asserts, “A claim that women are ‘silent’ or ‘silenced’ cannot mean that they are always and everywhere literally silent, nor that they lack the capacity to use language” (3). Rather, such a claim is made to emphasize that there has been “an absence of women’s voices from high culture” (Cameron 3). And such a claim situates and justifies Nina Baym’s inquiries in her text *Feminism and American Literary History: Essays*: “But so long silent, what will she say, and how will she say it?” (203).

Two questions that should be asked.

Two questions that preface well-known, feminist assumptions that language itself is gendered. Thus, tensions between women and writing are predicated upon the idea that language is *man*-made, that language is *male*-dominated—a phallogocentric discourse created by and for men, equating the pen with both the penis and the phallus.³⁶ As explained by Worthington, “According to Lacanian psychoanalytic theory...the subject is divided by her (negative) entry into the signifying chain of language” (108). Furthermore, “Femininity, that which is not expressible or comprehensible in the terms of the symbolic order (understood as the patriarchal system of signification that organizes experiences), is split and repressed in the unconscious. Relegated to the realm of the repressed unconscious, the sign ‘woman’ remains unreadable, and female freedom is theorized as unreadability” (Worthington 108-109). Thus, suffering from

³⁵ The latter can be claimed because of the fact that writing, despite the fact that women wrote, was wounded due to women’s gendered positionings.

³⁶ Even Gilbert and Gubar situate writing as *male*-centered, creating metaphors in relation to the female writing process, or rather imagination as they call it. They explain “a woman is denied the autonomy—the subjectivity—that the pen represent” (19). The terms phallogocentric and phallogocentrism relate to the idea that social relations as well as discourse are both created and controlled by the dominant male. A more complete definition can be found at the following website: <http://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/genderandsex/terms/phallogocentrism.html>. However, despite explaining that critics do equate the pen, penis, and phallus, I agree with Jane Gallop, who argues that an alteration is needed, and that is “to separate the symbolic phallus from the penis” (96). (Refer to *The Daughter’s Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982.)

oppression, existing within repression, and being barred from expression, women writers remain/ed in complex positionings, wounded in and by the craft of writing.³⁷

Layer these wounds with the wounds of traumatizing events—and attempting to write about these events—and there is no arguing against the fact that women *were* and *are* wounded.

Wounded by the dominant structure of gender.

Wounded in/by the writing.

And wounded by trauma.

Trauma and Women

The historical relationship between trauma and women is significant. To understand the layers of this relationship, I turn back to the evolving definition of trauma, specifically to how it had progressed to include the effects on both body *and* mind. In a way, this development seems to imply that the field of trauma examines/d a more complete definition of self. However, there are two problems here. One, this focus—oddly enough—removes/d the body. This is because the attention was now on the trauma of the mind. Two, this connection between trauma and mind was gendered. More specifically, the focus turned to exploring the trauma of the *woman's* mind, linking trauma and women in a manner that depicts women as wounded.

According to Herman, hysteria was the first psychological trauma to be explored (10).³⁸ And Freud is commonly associated with the beginnings of psychological trauma studies through

³⁷ This phrase was influenced by Robbins statement found in her text: “These terms, oppression, repression, and expression map—with little jiggling—onto the phrase literary feminist theory” (13). Robbins’s text provides a sufficient understanding about the development of feminism—while simultaneously arguing that ‘feminisms’ should be used to grasp the multiplicity and variations within this discourse. As she states, “No single explanation is enough. Causes and effects are multiple. That’s why we need more than one kind of explanation, more than one kind of feminism” (13).

³⁸ Herman’s chapter titled “A Forgotten History” explains incidences when “a particular form of psychological trauma has surfaced into public consciousness” (9).

and by examining the hysterical woman.³⁹ However, despite the fact that Freud is often thought to be the founding father of the concept of psychological trauma, it pre-dates his studies. In fact, “[t]he patriarch of the study of hysteria was the great French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot...[who called hysteria] ‘the Great Neurosis’” (Herman 10-11). Charcot studied the ‘disease’ and is best affiliated with his work connected to hypnosis; by 1880, he came to the conclusion that the “symptoms were *psychological*, since they could be artificially induced...through the use of hypnosis” (Herman 11).⁴⁰ This turn to the psychological realm trickled down to his followers—Pierre Janet, Joseph Breuer, *and* Sigmund Freud. I mention these names to situate ‘trauma’ as not only an evolving concept but also a larger story, a story that better highlights the (at that time) developing field of psychoanalysis, and a story that is neither the beginning nor the end of a more communal explanation of how trauma, in general, and specifically *psychological* trauma came to be publicly acknowledged as a concept.

After studying under Charcot and developing an interest for studies on hysterical trauma, Freud embarked on his own research, connecting trauma to a psychological occurrence outside of the consciousness (Herman 10-12). As Freud explains in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, “[What] [w]e describe as ‘traumatic’ [is] any excitations from outside which are *powerful* enough to break through the protective shield” (33, my emphasis). For Freud, identity can be broken down into three realms: the ego, the id, and the super-ego.⁴¹ He explains that the ego (or the self we project) is influenced by the id, which is instinctive and has a protective shield. Thus, when trauma breaks through, our ego is affected. Naturally, this is a simplified explanation of

³⁹ Freud’s piece on hysteria would be beneficial if further developing topics on hysteria/hysterics—as would George Did-Huberman’s *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière*.

⁴⁰ Herman notes that his studies also showed symptoms could be ‘relieved’ through hypnotic trances.

⁴¹ Freud is well-known for his “‘structural theory’ of the mind,” which identified three entities of the mind: “the id (the wholly unconscious domain of the mind, consisting of drives and of material later repressed), the ego (which is partly conscious and contains the defense mechanisms and the capacities to calculate, reason, and plan), and the super-ego (also only partly conscious, which harbors the conscience and, beyond that, unconscious feelings of guilt)” (xxii). Refer to Freud’s *The Ego and the Id* for more information.

his theoretic structure of identity, and there is a great deal more embedded within it. But we need only acknowledge that Freud argued that ‘powerful’ external forces *do* affect internal psyches. And such external forces and internal psyches became the basis of/for his psychological studies, studies that have theories, concepts, and cases that are often associated with Freud. One comes immediately to mind. With psychologist, and evolving psychoanalyst, Breuer, Freud is known to have studied the famous case that is associated with hysteria—the case of Anna O. The first hysteric.

Anna O. A pseudonym for Breuer’s patient. She was the woman who influenced both analysts’ theories on psychological trauma and led to the development of what is known as the “talking cure” (Herman 17).⁴² In addition, this case is commonly referred to as the beginning of psychotherapy, or rather, psychoanalysis.⁴³

But within this version of the story, both personal experiences and *Anna O.* are sidelined. On one hand, they are merely minute details to Freud’s story. On the other hand, they were the most powerful impetus to the development of his theories. Thus, there is a codependent relationship that is not acknowledged. More so, Anna O.’s subjectivity is compensated for her role as an *object* of study, for her role in benefitting *his* career, *his* theories. But I wonder how many people actually know her true name? After all, she was the first labeled hysteric woman as well as a fundamental person in the development in an entire field of study. Thus, if Freud is the father of psychoanalysis, then in a way, is Anna O. the mother?

⁴² I turn to Suzette Henke’s text *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women’s Life-Writing*, where Henke offers a concise explanation of Freud’s ‘talking cure’—“a psychoanalytic working-through repressed memories brought to the surface and abreacted through the use of language and free association” (xi). And I note that my engaging with Anna O. outside of being a psychoanalytic case was sparked by reading Herman’s historical chapter—where I learned about her as a person.

⁴³ I should note here that the term psycho-analysis was developed by Freud, but Pierre Janet called the method “psychological analysis” prior to Freud’s coining the technique that we know today (Herman 12).

I do not ask these questions to be facetious, nor do I ask them in attempts to embrace a feminist agenda. I merely want to emphasize the obvious—the fact that Freud gets the attention, the leading role in the story. This is proven by people’s lack of knowledge about Anna O.’s life, her experiences, her causes... her stories.

Bertha Pappenheim.

That was her name.

She was a woman who experienced a trauma—but who was not ‘traumatized’ forever. I make the distinction because she is best known as a ‘traumatized’ object that was studied, a ‘diseased’ person who was in need of ‘fixing.’ Thus, historically speaking, ‘psychological trauma’ originated with not only *studying* a woman but also attempting *to fix* her. Because she was *wounded*. She was *traumatized*. In fact, when people generally speak about a person who has experienced a trauma, they normally refer to her as ‘traumatized.’ Such connotation places the emphasis on the ‘trauma,’ removing possibilities for other stories to emerge, other roles to be recognized.

Pappenheim—

and everyone else who has experienced a trauma—

is much more than her wounds.

But those stories go untold.

And she is forever branded by her trauma.

Eternally labeled as a hysteric.

Hysteric, a noun, “a derivative from the Latin *husterikos*, or afflictions of the womb, because hysteria was thought to be due to womb/uterine disturbances” (Harris 45).

Hysteric, a noun, a word that describes a victim of psychological trauma that supposedly derived from disorders of the feminine *body*, affecting the feminine *mind*.⁴⁴ I do acknowledge that the whole concept of the nineteenth-century hysterical woman could be further examined, but that is a different project. Instead, the significant point that I want to focus on is the fact that this one word reiterates the idea that trauma studies has been, and continues to be, connected to effects on both the body and the mind.

Trauma and the Creative Spirit

However, trauma affects the *entire* self. All too often, theory in regards to trauma focuses on body and mind, overlooking the *creative spirit*. I argue that considering creative spirit would not only reconceptualize trauma's dominant story but also work towards understanding women writers who write their trauma stories by taking process and purpose into account. To understand better how creative spirit links to process and purpose, I offer an explanation of creativity itself, as the two are closely linked.

As defined by Jane Piirto, "Creativity is the personality, the process, and the product within a domain in interaction with genetic influences and with optimal environmental influences of home, school, community and culture, gender, and chance. Creativity is a basic human need to make new" (37).⁴⁵ Being a concept that is as individual as identity itself, creativity is difficult to explain and understand fully. Thus, difficulties arise when linking it with trauma, a concept that cannot be grasped fully. However, the two are linked. In his text titled *Creativity as Repair*, Andrew Brink insists that "the impulse to create usually comes from some early damage to the

⁴⁴ Gilbert and Gubar explain hysteria as a "female disease" and assert that historically "femaleness was in and of itself a deformity" (53). Furthermore, Harris elaborates on hysteria and Freud, stating that "[Freud] became convinced that hysteria was caused by psychological trauma" (42-50; 43).

⁴⁵ In her text *Understanding Creativity*, Piirto explains creativity as being connected to person, purpose, process, and product. Creativity and its links to trauma will be explored more throughout the dissertation chapters, specifically in chapter five.

self. Doubt, pain, trauma, insecurity, uncertainty—these are the fuel that drive the *creative process*” (DeSalvo, engaging with Brink, 34-35). Avoiding an absolute statement, Brink more accurately states that trauma and creativity are usually connected. And they are. However, when considering trauma, the focus remains on the body and the mind, and women who write trauma are often represented as mad, as hysteric, as traumatized—essentially, as wounded. As a byproduct, women who have experienced traumas and who write their trauma stories are seldom referred to as creative.

Thus, I argue that all too often, theory ignores possible positive effects that trauma has on individuals’ *creative spirit*, need to be active, drive to heal themselves *and* others. For example, Pappenheim eventually worked with her trauma, becoming an activist, a translator, an author, a feminist against the oppression of women: “Under the pseudonym, Paul Berthold, she translated into German the classic treatise by Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, and authored a play, *Women’s Rights*” (Herman 19). Her topics of interest revolved around her cause, her ‘fight against the abuse of women and children.’⁴⁶ She took her cause to her grave. Literally. Her will requests “that those who visited her grave would leave a small stone, ‘as a quiet promise...to serve the mission of women’s duties and women’s joy...unflinchingly and courageously” (Herman 20). Thus, she may have never written her own version about her trauma, but those stones represent many silent stories of trauma that go untold, many silent promises to work towards healing.

A creative, yet silent, expression that she left behind.

A creative expression that unites individual stories with a larger one.

⁴⁶ “[Pappenheim’s] fight against the abuse of women and children was almost a physically felt pain for her” (qtd in Herman 19). Her passion and empathy are evident. Herman writes that Pappenheim “found her voice, and her sanity in the woman’s liberation movement” (Herman 19).

But how many people know this version of Anna O.'s story?

How many people would label Anna O., or rather Bertha Pappenheim,
as a woman who embraced her creativity post-trauma,
as a healer?

Instead, the focus remains on the trauma. Such a focus happens to other women who have experienced traumas and decide to write about their experiences. Thus, individuals continue to be represented as wounded in trauma's dominant story. Trapped in the trauma. Indeed, women who write trauma are often represented as mad, as hysteric and as having altered perceptions of events, of relationships, of themselves. *Traumatized*. Wounded. Focusing on the *wound*.

However, links between the trauma and one's creative spirit *are* present. And Anna O.'s untold story explores such links, acting as one example of women writers who have experienced forms of trauma and have chosen to engage in the creative processes of expression as a means of healing post-trauma. Thus, I contend that links among trauma and creative spirit and writing and healing move analysis past a traumatized, wounded product by illuminating the purposes and processes of writing post-trauma. Doing so moves women beyond wounded positions, stressing that they are more.

Viewed as Wounded, But More than Wounds

Even Bertha Pappenheim found a means to indirectly write her (trauma) story within the limitations of her social positioning—by translating a work and authoring a play. And she continued to voice her story—through the use of another and through a communal cause—while ‘*[finding] her voice, and her sanity in the woman's liberation movement*’ (my emphasis). This spirals back to the idea that Pappenheim is seldom represented as ‘finding...her sanity.’ Rather,

she is commonly represented as powerless, as lacking the ability to ‘fix’ herself, thus, needing another (or rather, an ‘other’) to do so. This is an image of a woman dependent upon her male counterpart to undo her damage. These aspects intertwine power dynamics, self/other dyads, and social constructions—entities that cannot be ignored.

Especially when the ‘traumatized’ is female.

Even more so when ‘trauma’ is written.

Anna O. is not thought of as a writer. Instead, she is a case that promotes Freud’s personal success and aids *his* developing the field of psychoanalysis. However, this case simultaneously explains how the concept of trauma did *not* develop, bringing feminist studies into the equation on several levels. Most obviously, it highlights the fact that Freud’s research forefronts the element of gender by his focusing on “the association of hysterical symptoms with female sexuality”—viewing women as wounded objects (Herman 13). Not creative, artistic, generative subjects.

The very issue of ‘power’ exceeds the intensity of trauma itself (although there is no denying that trauma is powerful on its own accord) and crosses into gendered power structures. This tension between genders is evident simply by revealing how the concept of trauma further evolved. By this, I mean that studies of trauma did ‘fix’ women in a social position dependent upon her male analyst to ‘fix’ her. But also, studies brought social problems and power struggles to light, drawing attention to not only how women were violated and oppressed but also how *common* such incidences were. As Herman points out, “The study of hysteria had lured them into a netherworld of trance, emotionality, and sex. It had required them to listen to women far

more than they had ever expected to listen, and to find out much more about women's lives than they had ever wanted to know" (Herman 17). In other words, these studies of 'psychological trauma' reveal women as victims of socially constructed 'power' relationships *and* as victims of 'sexual trauma.'

And to acknowledge such 'sexual trauma' would be to admit that oppression and abuse against women existed, and to do so would call social standards into question and potentially jeopardize their own agendas and social positions (Herman 19). Thus, theorists were not amused with aligning themselves with any social/feminist movement and inadvertently or blatantly chose to cling to the 'scientific,' the 'theoretical' components that merely bettered their own masculine objectives and social positions. As Herman notes, Freud is, once again, at the forefront of the list:

To hold fast to his theory would have been to recognize the depths of sexual oppression of women and children. The only potential source of intellectual validation and support for this position was the nascent feminist movement, which threatened Freud's cherished patriarchal values. To ally himself with such a movement was unthinkable for a man of Freud's political beliefs and professional ambitions (19).

Thus, rather than working towards 'fixing' social problems and questioning social positions, studies were abandoned. Even Freud "dissociated himself at once from the study of psychological trauma *and from women*" (Herman 19, my emphasis). As a result, 'trauma' as a concept was no longer a large concern for the public.

But the term 'trauma' soon surfaced again within the public sphere with the 'trauma' of the First World War (Leys 4; Herman 20). Only this time, 'trauma' as a concept shifted to a more *masculine* focus. Literally. Under the context of war, 'trauma' was now associated with a

‘masculine’ topic of ‘power.’ Social attention transferred from women’s hysteria to men’s war wounds, or rather, to “soldiers [who] began to act like hysterical women” (Herman 20). Thus, with ‘the catastrophe of the First World War,’ society began to recognize better the effects of trauma—only the emphasis was placed on men and the public topic of war.⁴⁷ Women and personal traumas were viewed differently, if viewed at all.

However, (male) soldiers and their behaviors post-trauma were now the *subjects* of trauma studies. Unlike their female counterparts, they once possessed positions of power; furthermore, they maintained powerful roles, being viewed as heroes. I juxtapose the two only to point out an aspect that is often overlooked: ‘Traumatized’ men of war are often represented as heroic and powerful, whereas ‘traumatized’ women are seen as victims, as weak, as diseased, having no power (at the time of trauma, and even post-trauma). Kalí Tal, author of *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*, offers an explanation that positions this divide:

Women, by contrast [to men at war], almost never control the tools of violence. Their traumatic experience – rape, incest, battering – is the most extreme form of the oppression visited on them by a society that generally reduces them to victims. Therein lies the most important difference between the trauma of the warrior and the trauma of the woman victim. Women view their trauma as a natural extension of *powerlessness* (139, my emphasis).

But it is not only ‘traumatized’ women who view ‘trauma as a natural extension of powerlessness.’ Rather, they view *and* are viewed, thus, further marginalizing them—even within the context of ‘trauma.’

⁴⁷ As Judith Herman writes, “The reality of psychological trauma was forced upon public consciousness once again by the catastrophe of the First World War” (Herman 20). I note that with the war came an influx of creative therapies as “miracle cures” (Malchiodi 5). Refer to Cathy A. Malchiodi’s edited collection titled *Expressive Therapies*.

However, the attention on trauma, which focused on “war neuroses during World War I,” fizzled as the war concluded (Leys 4-5). Thus, I would be naïve to ignore the fact that there is an element of mimesis, echoing social patterns and cultural events, which inadvertently affect/ed the very concept of trauma. And because of this, ‘trauma’ did not stay out of the public’s radar for long. Both World War II and the Holocaust “succeeded in arousing widespread interest in trauma” (Leys 5). And similarly, women and their experiences, once again, remained silent/silenced within the field of trauma, continuing to be marginalized. And as a result, their personal stories of trauma were ignored. And some may even claim, avoided.

In fact, Herman explains, “The real conditions of women’s lives were hidden in the sphere of the personal, in private life...To speak about experiences in sexual or domestic life was to invite public humiliation, ridicule, and disbelief. Women were silenced by fear and shame” (28). Such silencing began to change with the emergence of historical moments that name violence against women as wrong, lessening social taboos of speaking on such topics and opening up spaces for some of writing to emerge. For example, Riki Thompson argues, “[D]ue to an ideological shift—brought about by the government’s enactment of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act that was passed in 1974—a social space was opened for a dialogue about this issue that did not previously exist in American society” (658). With changes in the law came changes in writing. Or at least, what was publicly displayed. And ‘trauma narratives’ and ‘traumatized’ authors spoke out.

Herman even notes, “[T]he feminist movement offered a new language for understanding the impact of sexual assault” (30; Tal 155). Indeed, the feminist movement named and renamed a number of (violent) acts, drawing attention to the patriarchal oppression of women while simultaneously giving women a stronger sense of agency and interconnectedness. Thus, women

began to recognize that they were not alone, and laws against violence developed (Herman 29-32). With growing social awareness and having more collective support, women began to shift their internalizations of themselves and their past, and they began to speak, to write the unspeakable. For example, Thompson notes, the “emergence of the sexual abuse recovery movement [began] in the 1980s, as women were encouraged to find their own voice and refuse to remain silent about the abuse and oppression [of] the experience” (671). Such encouragement to share their stories resulted in a social call to ‘break the silence’ and speak/write their wounds. Literally, women began to speak out. Against rape. Against violence.⁴⁸ And women’s expressions were verbal, artistic, and written. As Tal proclaims, “The first editions of incest and rape narrative were published in the mid to late 1970s and 1980s. They were a product of the feminist consciousness which was fostered by the woman’s movement” (156). Women were fighting for a larger cause by “‘personalizing’ the literary text” (Felski 84). As Michelle Payne points out in her article “A Strange Unaccountable Something: Historicizing Sexual Abuse Essays,”

The feminist movement that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s is often identified as the point at which issues of sexual violence were significantly reinterpreted, analyzed not as ‘unnatural sexual acts,’ but as acts of violence supported and created by Western, patriarchal family structures. Women were encouraged to ‘break the silence’...The personal became the political (123).

The personal *did* become the political.

And vice versa.

⁴⁸ Herman explains that “the first public speakout on rape was organized by the New York Radical Feminists in 1971,” initiating the move towards reforms across the US that “encourage[d] silenced victims of sexual crimes to come forward” (29). Suzette Henke also notes that ‘trauma’ terminology developed in conjunction with the times, noting that the American Psychiatric Association named “post-traumatic stress disorder in its official therapeutic manual as a real illness” in 1980 (xi).

Or rather, I should say that the personal became the political became the autobiographical.

And women who had experienced traumas wrote.

They wrote their feelings; they wrote their fears.

They wrote their words; they wrote their wounds.

They wrote their stories...

Their 'unspeakable' stories.

3 PANDORA'S BOX: RECONCEPTUALIZING THE PROBLEM OF WRITING (ABOUT) TRAUMA

*Like the biblical Eve, Pandora unlooses a plague of ills
by touching the forbidden—by opening a box.
- Fraser (151-152)⁴⁹*

As explained in the previous chapter, women began to ‘break the silence’ and share their wounds once they felt as if the law allowed them to do so. They began to write their stories of trauma. However, I contend that despite the changes to the law, despite the argument that she now ‘refuse[d] to remain silent about the abuse and oppression,’ and even despite the influx of women writers, a woman who wrote her personal story was, and continues to be, viewed negatively.⁵⁰ She is expected—then and now—to keep her private life locked. Furthermore, when the topic is women’s personal trauma, the topic is too problematic and stresses victimization. In other words, exposing her personal story is a sort of ‘problem,’ and she who writes about such events is considered to have opened a sort of ‘Pandora’s box,’ thus, implying that writing, sharing personal stories of trauma is taboo.

Women and their personal stories have indeed been “labeled a problem, a Pandora’s box” (Gannett 4). This chapter situates the genre of trauma narratives as a “Pandora’s box”—a metaphor that highlights that women’s personal traumas are expected to remain locked away and avoided because they unleash the unwanted, because they open unknown. Furthermore, I assert that when trauma narratives are acknowledged in literary studies, they are so under what could be construed as a masculine context, namely war, scientific diseases, and natural disasters—all topics that are more definable, more known, more easily boxed—continuing to avoid the more

⁴⁹ Assume Fraser citations are *My Father’s House: A Memoir of Incest and Healing* unless noted otherwise.

⁵⁰ There was an influx in women writers as well as the topics that were being explored (Smith & Watson, *Reading*, 107-108). In *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interrupting Life Narratives*, Smith and Watson explain specific topics that have been, and continue to be, explored: exile, ethnic identity, prison experiences, childhood (trauma), illness, coming-out, and aging to name a few (107-108).

ambiguous, less containable stories of trauma (such as women's abuse and incest narratives).

Thus, despite the previous chapter's emphasis on the idea that the 'feminist movement offered a new language' for women to 'break the silence,' I contend that these stories of trauma continue to be "too much" to bear, marginalized, and viewed as problematic, or rather, *pandoric*.

In this chapter, I engage with the autobiographical and interrogate representations of Pandora in order to understand better the implications of labeling any personal writing, especially writing that encompasses trauma, as pandoric. I do this by exploring past portrayals of Pandora—the mythical figure—and then moving to a brief historical outline of the genre of life-writing in order to confirm that it is indeed a field that is pandoric, albeit for different reasons than commonly understood. Thus, I modify well-known associations of Pandora within literary and feminist discourses by drawing from creative therapist Shaun McNiff and comparative literary theorist Vered Lev Kenaan. Using these two scholars, I reconceptualize trauma narratives as pandoric by disrupting and reinterpreting what it means to be labeled as a 'Pandora' or to be identified as opening Pandora's box in efforts to invite new perspectives. I do so by returning to McNiff's interpretation of Pandora meaning "too many" things and by embracing Lev Kenaan's argument that Pandora is not only a figure of rhetoric but also a representation of "feminine beauty." These points are supported with an analysis of Sylvia Fraser's texts and references of Pandora. Such analyses contend that women writing their traumas better transgress their marginality, by engaging with the multiple, the ambiguous, the indefinable—the *pandoric* nature of their trauma, a term that should be reconceptualized to include these traits, a term that should represent transgression, transformation, and creation.

The Problem of Pandora

The image of Pandora and her box is *not* commonly associated as being a symbol of transgression. In fact, it is commonly understood as holding negative connotations. As art therapist Shaun McNiff asserts, “Within general culture the Pandora image often represents what ‘we do not want to do’: don’t open the lid and let everything out; keep it all under control or it will overwhelm you” (*Art*, 151). Furthermore, society is conditioned to think that people should not open Pandora’s box as it unleashes something uncontrollable, something that should be avoided, creating ‘a problem’ if unlocked.

We, as individuals of a Western culture, are encouraged to keep ‘it’ (whatever ‘it’ is) contained—in a nice, little box, where everything has a label, a definition, a place. In other words, if ‘it’ is going to disrupt our order, then ‘it’ should remain locked away where ‘it’ cannot be experienced. Such ideas of are based on the idea that opening this ‘box,’ or rather, ‘unleashing’ what is locked away will overwhelm individuals, resulting in something that is indeed ‘*too much*’ to bear. When transferring this association to literary and feminist studies, it is obvious why such a representation is problematic. In other words, ‘unleashing’ whatever ‘it’ is, is thought to result in a state of pandemonium.

A state that is not desired. A state that is a problem.

A state that is associated with disorder and destruction.

A state that *is* linked to the image of Pandora.

Asserting that Pandora is viewed as “the cause of pandemonium,” McNiff points out that even the term ‘pandemonium’ is closely linked to the word ‘Pandora’ (*Art*, 151). However, McNiff continues to stress the problem of society’s (mis)interpretation of Pandora by highlighting the fact that she “*came to be perceived* as ‘too much’” to handle, ‘too much’ to

experience (*Art*, 151, my emphasis). So if she evolved into this image, then can she be reconceptualized?

McNiff continues, “[Pandora,] [t]he ‘all-giver,’ changed from being the source of bounteous gifts to the cause of pandemonium... Pandora’s ‘many things’ came to be perceived as ‘too much’” (151, my emphasis). McNiff argues that Pandora was not always a ‘problem’; rather, an earlier interpretation of Pandora encompassed her and her ‘many things.’ However, before I can engage further with reconceptualizing the general understanding of Pandora, I must first assert that her many stories are directly in line with the idea that she represents ‘many things,’ and thus, holds an ambiguous nature.

Pandora and Her Many Stories

Pandora and her ‘many things’ reflect the fact that Pandora herself has ‘many stories.’ Historically speaking, the commonly accepted (and negative) depiction of Pandora and her ‘box’ has evolved over time, changing over the centuries as they have been represented and re-presented in various versions and mediums. By engaging with some of the alterations to this myth—a myth that is meant to convey what is socially and culturally accepted, a myth that allows themes across cultures to emerge—I challenge this unilateral and negative interpretation of Pandora and the opening of her ‘box’ as being an image that represents ‘too much’ to experience, that unleashes only evil, and that symbolizes a ‘problem’ that should remain locked away. I do so to mediate within and beyond these negative connotations of Pandora in efforts to reconceptualize the meaning of Pandora (the image) and pandoric (the quality), as these terms are associated with women and their personal stories.

When it comes to the myth of Pandora, Dora and Erwin Panofsky are pioneers in the field. In their book titled *Pandora’s Box: The Changing Aspects of a Mythical Symbol*, they

engage with cross-cultural, cross-century, and cross-discipline meanings that have been attributed to Pandora and the opening of her box. Beginning their textual exploration of Pandora, they immediately question how this popular version of Pandora and her story emerged. They write, “Why is it she became famous on account of an attribute that was neither a box nor properly hers?” (Panofsky and Panofsky 3). In this one question, they disrupt not only the accepted shape but also the idea of ownership. Furthermore, tracing the many (and different) representations of Pandora—from literary to artistic images—the Panofsky pair even asserts that it is not even clear if Pandora was the one who originally opened the box.⁵¹ They write, “Several poets and artists from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century depict Epimetheus [her husband] opening Pandora’s box” (Panofsky and Panofsky 17). These two authors grasp onto the idea that “by virtue of a grammatical ambiguity...it was Epimetheus rather than Pandora who committed the actual offense” (17).⁵² Thus, society’s unquestioned interpretation of Pandora becomes muddled with unknowns and indefinites. Now, it is unclear if Pandora *owned* the box, if it was a *box*, and if she *opened* it all.

Such muddled representations are needed to stress the idea that there is more to Pandora’s ‘story’ than the well-known version, this universally accepted concept of Pandora and how she opened a ‘box.’ Rather, Pandora’s ‘story’ exists in multiplicity. Thus, it cannot be ‘boxed’ into one, exact meaning—like society attempts.

Throughout the multiple stories that emerged over the centuries, Pandora became associated with a ‘box,’ one that contained all the evils of mankind. However, I reiterate that this

⁵¹ As an example of exploring different disciplines, I note that the authors engage with artists such as Rosso Fiorentino and writers such as Hawthorne, respectively explaining when a ‘box’ is present and whether or not ‘hope’ is represented; the authors also engage with changes that depict Pandora as “childlike” (34, 110). A complete (re)account is out of the scope of this dissertation, as are the implications of these variations.

⁵² Being the wife of Epimetheus, Pandora is said to be “the mother of all women” (Panofsky and Panofsky 7-8). This is important when deciding whether one views Pandora as a figure who unleashes evil or holds on to hope, or both (which I view is the more accurate connotation). I will not debate whether she or her husband ‘opened’ the container—as Pandora is the one attributed to the action.

‘box’ may not have been a ‘box’ at all. Rather, tracing the evolution of this image, Panofsky and Panofsky note that this ‘box’ was in actuality a large *pithos*, or “storage jar for...preservation” (8). The date of when this container changed from a vase-like image to a box has been disputed. For some, such as scholar Jane Harrison, it is believed that Lelio Gregorio Giraldi was the one who altered the image into a box with his “[r]etelling and commenting upon the story of Pandora” around 1548 (Panofsky and Panofsky 14). Giraldi’s interpretation “claims in fact that Jupiter, full of resentment, had sent Pandora to Prometheus ‘with a *box* most beautiful but concealing within [it] every kind of calamity’” (Panofsky and Panofsky 14-15, my emphasis). However, Panofsky and Panofsky note that this alteration in Pandora’s story actually happened about forty years earlier, claiming that Erasmus of Rotterdam is “the person really responsible for ‘Pandora’s box’” in 1508 (15).

Regardless of whether this change occurred in early- or mid-1500s, it is a change that has remained, producing and reproducing negative, one-sided associations when society uses the image of Pandora and her ‘box’ as well as when literary critics use the phrase “Pandora’s Box.” Thus, over five hundred years later, Western civilization remains quick to accept, to refer, and to re-present the mythical Pandora and her box as an image of overwhelming pandemonium, as a ‘problem’ that should be avoided.

Such depictions *box* Pandora into one definition, sidelining many of the original stories and ignoring the ambiguities and multiplicities that should be highlighted. Pandora was not *just* evil. In fact, the creation of Pandora is based upon multiple portions that stand alone while simultaneously creating a whole. In other words, Pandora as a whole is “the image of a beautiful woman...perfected by all the other Gods [by their giving her gifts]...and since the gifts of Aphrodite and Hermes were harmful rather than beneficial, the final product turned out to be a...

‘beautiful evil’” (Panofsky and Panofsky 7-8). An amalgamation that is often ignored to focus on the negative. An amalgamation that is a mixture of many entities, both good and bad—as her *pithos* contained *both* evil and *hope*, a combination that is neither completely bad nor completely good.

I insist that the many stories of Pandora expand the meaning of this image, refusing to relegate her to one negative association, refusing to ‘box’ her into one common assumption. Rather, Pandora is more. And literary critics should remain open to Pandora’s multiple interpretations, multiple stories. Furthermore, critics should remain open to Pandora’s ‘many things’—as she is more than an image of evil. She is also an image of multitude, of ambiguity, and of feminine creation.⁵³

Stressing these aspects aids in transforming the representation of Pandora into an image that not only recognizes but also celebrates the ‘many things’ that encompasses her. Doing so, in turn, opens the ‘box’ in which Pandora has been placed, allowing more positive associations to emerge.

The Problem of Trauma

However, positive associations do not emerge so easily, especially when people have been conditioned to view the image of Pandora and her box in negative lights. Furthermore, the contents in the box are thought to bring disorder. Such destructive viewpoints have also been associated with trauma itself—as it is often viewed as a secret, as something that should be kept locked away, something that will disrupt a calm life. Engaging with Peter Levine, Maggie Kline, and Ann Frederick, I contend that the concept of trauma has become a ‘problem’ for not only individuals who experience the trauma but also society who should acknowledge the trauma. I

⁵³ Pandora may be associated with feminine creation because she is attributed to being the mother of all. In addition, the vase/jar shape further highlights her femininity because of the circular, womb-like shape (Panofsky and Panofsky 7-8; Lev Kenaan 36, 88).

outline two main reasons for my labeling trauma as a ‘problem’ before moving on to explain how these factors create tensions when literary critics engage with topics of trauma.

The first reason is directly connected to the fact that many people ‘box’ trauma away as being something that is completely incomprehensible. Such inability to understand a topic perhaps increases the avoidance, as people relate ‘incomprehensible’ with ‘impossible’ yielding a detachment to any effort that attempts to increase understanding. In fact, Peter Levine and Maggie Kline suggest that “[t]rauma is perhaps *the most avoided, ignored, belittled, denied, misunderstood, and untreated* cause of human suffering” (qtd in Levine and Kline 3, my emphasis). This avoidance, denial, misunderstanding may be by society in general, but the truth is that such factors extend beyond a general audience, relating to those who have directly experienced forms of trauma. To reiterate a point made in the former chapter, people who experienced traumas may ‘avoid’ and ‘deny’ the trauma as defense mechanisms, blocking the trauma and even numbing themselves for survival. By ignoring the trauma, people create a false reality in which they can contain, manage, understand, label, box. Locking away the trauma. Because attempts at recognizing the trauma reveals powerlessness and attempts at better understanding the trauma seem to fall short.

Thus, trauma may be ‘avoided, ignored, belittled, denied, [and] misunderstood,’ but I recognize such detachments as being directly related to society’s and individuals’ drives to maintain power, to understand and label everything, and even to protect others from harm. This last claim is based on the idea that individuals who have experienced traumas may internalize their personal pains, labeling them as ‘too much’ for others to bear, and may consciously refrain from sharing the trauma with others.⁵⁴ Thus, the ‘problem’ of trauma is further complicated

⁵⁴ Herman writes, “Until proven otherwise, [the traumatized patient] assumes that the therapist cannot bear to hear the true story of trauma” (138).

simply because of people thinking that their traumas are too ‘problematic’ for others to comprehend, too painful to share, ‘too much’ to bear, creating an un/conscious distance between them and others while simultaneously further reinforcing the incomprehensible nature of the trauma.

Because of this, the trauma and all of the images and sensations associated with the trauma itself remain locked up. Unexpressed and unexamined. Ignored and incomprehensible. A silent, unacknowledged problem. Furthermore, this ‘problem’ literally becomes the ‘unthinkable.’ Such a term is appropriate because people try to not think about the trauma that they cannot fully understand, but it also implies that the traumatic act is so horrible, so extreme that it is *unthinkable*, not understanding why or how it happened.

There is yet another reason why I claim that trauma as a concept remains a problem for both individuals and the general society—the fact that it is ‘so commonplace.’ Peter Levine and Ann Frederick note the ordinariness of trauma, claiming that the severity rests in the acceptance that such acts are everyday occurrences. They write, “Trauma has become so commonplace that most people don’t even recognize its presence” (Levine and Frederick 41). Perhaps the commonality of it results in people’s inability ‘to recognize its presence,’ but equally disturbing is the fact that such commonality results in an inability to name it as traumatic, as something that *is* ‘extraordinary.’⁵⁵ Thus, trauma poses as a non-issue, and people avoid it, ignore it, or even view it as just another ‘problem’ of their ordinary life. Furthermore, this fact that trauma is ‘so commonplace’ runs the risk of desensitizing people from the shock, resulting in nonchalant attitudes towards not only the present traumatic occurrence(s) but also the possibilities to change

⁵⁵ Events are identified as “extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life” (Herman 33).

future interpretations of trauma. Thus, society, in general, falls victim to repeating the same ‘problems’ when it comes to (not) recognizing trauma.

Trauma’s Problem of Repetition

Paradoxically enough, trauma *is* being recognized more and more in both social and literary spaces, becoming an emerging scholarly field. So how can I claim that trauma is avoided and ignored, yet becoming publicly prominent? The answer exists within trauma’s problem of repetition. In other words, I contend that trauma is not entirely avoided; rather, certain traumas are. When trauma is acknowledged by society and explored by literary scholars, the same topics are commonly, or rather repeatedly, considered—neglecting to engage with topics that continue to be viewed as ‘too much’ to bear. By extending trauma’s problem past the incomprehensible and the unthinkable, explaining that it is also one of repetition, I question what trauma stories are repeatedly acknowledged and what trauma stories continue to be silenced. Such questions are contextualized within the emerging literary field of trauma.

I first turn to literary scholar Suzette Henke, who asserts that today’s world is a world of trauma. She writes, “The twentieth century may well be remembered as a century of historical trauma. As citizens facing the third millennium, we daily confront the unthinkable in news and television reports... relentless statistics exposing rape, murder torture, battering, and child abuse in an increasingly violent society” (xi). Thus, Henke situates her literary analyses of female “shattered subjects” within an urgent and emergent field where traumatic happenings are inescapable, and even prolific.

There is no denying that trauma *is* indeed emerging within literary discourses. In fact, last year’s 40th Northeast Modern Language Association convention in Boston, MA, had at least five panels on the topic, and the call for papers for the 2009 Modern Language Association

convention listed twelve distinct panels that mention ‘trauma.’⁵⁶ However, I argue that within the topic itself, we, as literary scholars, ‘box’ our explorations within topics that fall into the context of war, politics, medicine, history, and natural disasters. Such trauma topics are more easily defined, more easily contained, more easily explored. We ‘know’ science and history; we can engage with *these* topics. Furthermore, such topics remove both responsibility and agency from society. In other words, we cannot blame society for the trauma because we have no (or little) control of the ‘historical’ past, the ‘scientific’ medical illnesses, and the ‘natural’ disasters. Such a false sense of safety, such containable knowns, and such personal distance within these topics make them more appropriate for public discourses.

In addition, these topics (of science and war) situate trauma within what could be construed as masculine frameworks, continuing to ignore the ‘silent’ and ‘feminine’ stories of trauma. Thus, personal trauma stories by women continue to be marginalized—even within the emerging field—kept locked away because they are thought to be ‘too much’ of a ‘problem,’ ‘too much’ of a ‘Pandora’s box’ to bear.

Thus, I argue that critics tend to focus on the historical, the scientific, the medical traumas, ignoring the more ‘personal,’ more ‘feminine’ topics of trauma such as rape, abuse, violence. To claim that women’s personal trauma stories are avoided altogether would be naïve—as I acknowledge that literary scholars do make attempts to engage with these trauma stories. For example, Jamie Carr of Niagara University chaired a panel at the 2009 Northeastern Modern Language Association convention on “Women Writing Trauma”—a panel title that seems in line with my research and implies to interrogate gendered placement and the un/conscious sidelining of ‘personal’ stories. However, the presentations were situated within

⁵⁶ The number of panels that highlight trauma in the session title dropped between the call and the conference.

the context of *war* and *politics*—contexts that, again, may be construed as safe/r (and masculine), avoiding topics that are ‘too much,’ too chaotic, too uncontrollable, too unexplainable.

What does this say about our exploration of traumatic topics? Is it just ‘too much’ for literary scholars to examine more personal, more ‘feminine’ topics of trauma? Is it ‘too much’ for us to admit that such topics exist, ‘too much’ for us to acknowledge that we cannot control or understand everything? Are we more comfortable speaking about ‘trauma’ in relation to ‘history’ and ‘science’ because of the ‘exacts’ that naturally coincide with these topics? Are topics such as rape, abuse, and violence so individual, so unexplainable, so at odds with society’s innate attempt to label, to fix everything that these topics remain too much of a “Pandora’s Box” to be examined? Are these topics too personal to cross into the public sphere?

I ask these questions to stress that trauma may be emerging, but this emergence itself is problematic due to society’s need to label, to fix, to box matters. And as a result, scholars un/consciously and repeatedly reproduce dominant discourses, silencing the most personal of these stories—those written by women about their most personal wounds.

The Problem of Genre

Women who do choose to write their traumas have been and continue to be marginalized by their gender, as explained in chapter two, but matters are further complicated because their text is positioned by not only gender but also *genre*. Historically, women writers textualized their personal experiences in what has been labeled as inferior genres such as letters and journals. These genres may serve as vehicles to blur public and private divides, but I contend they are ultimately viewed as more of ‘a problem’ when writing engages with women’s most personal experiences. To do so, I first explain that the problem is the ‘personal experience’ aspect by engaging with literary critic Cinthia Gannett. Next, I expand this claim to encompass

autobiography as a genre, stressing that it, as a whole, is a “Pandora’s box”—viewed in a negative light. After which, I turn directly to a historical outline of the genre of autobiography to challenge its current positioning in literary studies, claiming that despite its strides, it remains marginalized and wounded within a masculinized canon.

As Cinthia Gannett insists, “The diary because of its associations with women’s experiences, voices, and perspectives, has been labeled a problem, a Pandora’s box” (Gannett 193).⁵⁷ I reiterate Gannett’s words to stress that it is not the diary itself that is a “Pandora’s box”; rather, it is the fact that this genre lends itself to expose ‘women’s experiences, voices, and perspectives.’ Thus, women’s experiences, viewpoints, personal stories are/were considered to unleash something unwanted, something that should be avoided. And as a result, any genre that is directly connected to women’s private experiences has been and will be construed as being a ‘problem.’

Furthermore, when discussing women, their personal experiences, and private selves, pioneer in autobiographical studies Shari Benstock explains that women’s autobiographical studies itself is a marginal field. In her edited collection *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women’s Autobiographical Writings*, Benstock expresses that “women’s autobiographical writings...are often avoided altogether” when it comes to theory and practice (2). She continues, “[I]t is overlooked or misrepresented by ‘theoretical’ critics,” and women’s writings remain “vulnerable” within literary discourses (Benstock 2, 3). Her words situate writings about ‘private’ topics in a marginal position within public discourses, and I contend that these words, these positionings are still relevant—as autobiographical genres have existed and continue to exist in comparison to its masculine, dominant counterpart.

⁵⁷ I should note here that ‘diaries’ are also considered as holding a “particular importance for women, allowing them to become authors in private, and thus circumvent a historical prohibition” (Anderson 34). I return to this again in this chapter, and explore it more in depth through interrogating ‘resistance’ in the following chapter.

Marginal. Oppressed. Wounded.

Benstock's claim that 'it is overlooked or misrepresented' pertains to autobiographical genres, especially trauma narratives, twenty years later—as argued in the previous sections where I identified that women and their personal trauma stories *are overlooked* in lieu of more masculine topics. However, before I can assert how trauma narratives are the most problematic “Pandora's box” of all autobiographical genres, I must first historically outline women's autobiography as a problematic genre. Such an outline will demonstrate that despite our literary progression, there is still room for change and possibilities to emerge—and these changes cannot be made without opening up our perceptions of Pandora coupled with our perceptions of autobiographies, specifically ‘trauma narratives.’

Autobiography as a genre officially “first emerges as a distinctive form in the eighteenth century” and has always been “implicated by gender” (Felski 87; Anderson 3).⁵⁸ These eighteenth-century writings were “predicated upon the possibility and legitimacy of self-knowledge” (Felski 87). But such temporal placement of the genre is in reference to terminology alone. As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson explain in *Reading Autobiographies: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, writing about ‘the self’ through letters, poems, and other forms of confessionals dates back to times of antiquity having a heightened awareness of women writers in the seventeenth century (85, 95).⁵⁹ Thus, women and their autobiographical writings became more public in the seventeenth-century with “the rise of the epistolary form” (Smith and Watson, *Reading*, 95). Such seventeenth-century texts had an “active interest in self-scrutiny and spiritual introspection, often in the form of diaries” while the eighteenth century brought about

⁵⁸ It has been described as “a uniquely Western form and a specific achievement of Western culture at a moment of individuation in the wake of Enlightenment” (Smith & Watson, *Reading*, 84).

⁵⁹ Refer to Smith and Watson's *Reading* text and *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* edited collection for complete details.

“the admission of guilt and appeal to a higher authority” (Felski 87). The eighteenth century brought “a gradual shift from a form of self-analysis...to an exploration of intimacy, emotion, and self-understanding” (Felski 87). This progression of autobiographical writing reveals the dual play between writing the ‘self’ and adhering to social and literary standards. Thus, despite “an explosion in both the kinds and the sheer number of life narratives,” personal writings and the genres that encompassed them may be seen as “autobiographical presentation[s],” or rather, written versions of ‘the self’ that performed ‘acceptable’ gendered roles (Smith and Watson, *Reading*, 97, 95). This was because women’s personal experiences and their private writings were ‘too much’ for the public’s acceptance, ‘too much’ against social norms, and thus, often remained silenced.

Because of this, there may have been a substantial increase in “the numbers of women writing in the eighteenth century,” but a woman writer may have made strides, but did not ‘[transgress] the boundaries of her gender’ and of the genre quite yet (Lanser 26).⁶⁰ As feminist critic Patricia Spacks notes, this century’s autobiographical writings written by women merely existed within “a fantasy of feminine strength” and a “confession of inadequacy” (qtd in Heilbrun 22). Noting that women did not disrupt or change their social positioning, Spacks situates women’s writing in this century as reinforcing inferiority and even self-effacement in comparison to the dominant counterpart. As a result, both genre and gender continued to remain in inferior positions.⁶¹ To explain better, I turn to Smith and Watson who confirm, “Even as [women] wrote about themselves...their writing of daily selves reproduced gendered

⁶⁰ The citation is from Lanser’s *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice*, whereas the phrase ‘[transgress] the boundaries of her gender’ refers directly to Lev Kenaan’s text on Pandora and Lev Kenaan’s citation, which will be highlighted later in this chapter.

⁶¹ Smith and Watson further note the inability of women to break out of an inferior positioning: “In England, middle-class women who were sufficiently educated wrote letters (Mary Delany, Elizabeth Carter) and kept diaries (Hester Thrale, Fanny Burney), seemingly the *marginal forms of marginal subjects*...” (*Reading*, 98, my emphasis).

ideologies,” writing and performing gendered roles and expectations within “marginal forms,” or rather within ‘inferior’ genres (*Reading*, 98).

I reiterate how women have historically negotiated their gendered positions to write within literary discourses to stress that even when autobiographical writings have not been overtly labeled as a “Pandora’s box,” they silently existed as such—simply because of the tensions embedded within both gender and genre. In other words, there is no denying that women of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were part of a larger Pandora’s box that unconsciously worked towards locking up women and their private experiences. But as time progressed, women and their experiences began to find their way into literary scenes more readily—through the genre of the novel. As Virginia Woolf declares in *Women and Writing*, “In the early nineteenth century, women’s *novels* were largely autobiographical” (49, my emphasis). Packaged as fiction and sometimes written under a pseudonym, women’s novels exposed glimpses of women’s psyche without overcrossing the socialized boundaries. They pushed the envelope, which did open up literary spaces. Their writings contained personal elements, and they even are recognized as having, as sharing a larger story to tell. Virginia Woolf continues, “One of their motives that led them to write was the desire to expose their suffering, to plead their causes” (*Women and Writing*, 49).

‘To expose *their* suffering, to plead *their* causes.’

Thus, the nineteenth century opened up spaces that in turn allowed what Linda Anderson would call a “feminist political agenda” to emerge (88).

Historically speaking, women and their stories became an area of interest, receiving more focus. As a byproduct, there was an exposure of old and emergence of new ‘autobiographical’ stories by women writers. And autobiography is soon positioned as a genre that better opened

(and continues to open) up spaces for women to write, for women to negotiate between public and private, “suit[ing] [their] expressive needs quite well” and allowing them to engage with “many different ways of writing the subject” (Gannett 97; Anderson 87).⁶² Thus, possibilities emerged for women, allowing them a means to become authors.

Despite this, autobiography remains a “Pandora’s box” because it is a marginalized genre, seen as holding an inferior literary placement and reinforcing women and their stories as oppressed.⁶³ In fact, Julia Swindle writes, “Autobiography now has the potential to be *the text of the oppressed*” (qtd in Anderson 103, my emphasis). Being labeled as ‘the text’ of ‘the oppressed’ continues to marginalize both writers and genre—reinforcing problems while trying to avoid them.

The Problem of Labeling Autobiography and Trauma Narratives

Labels yield preconceived notions and hold the potential to create implications that do more harm than good. For example, labeling autobiography as ‘the text of the oppressed’ focuses on the *marginality*, the oppression—an act that I assert is unneeded. Furthermore, this problem of labeling autobiography is a literary problem that extends beyond attempting to transgress these oppressive and marginal positions for both authors and texts. In other words, this genre becomes *more* problematic because of its many labels. By briefly engaging with this genre’s many names, I contend that such multiplicity hinders the positive developments of the genre by creating a category that may be recognized as ‘too much’ to contain. After which, I focus on the possibilities and limitations of naming autobiography’s sub-genre ‘trauma narratives’ as such. I do so in order to challenge *this* (sub)genre and to insist that both

⁶² Anderson also notes that there was “the *problem* of the subject” (87, my emphasis).

⁶³ Engaging with Shari Benstock, Gannett explains that any autobiographical genre was “non-traditional...by men’s standards,” thus, existing in lieu of more dominant genres and remaining in an inferior position—if we were to create a hierarchy out of the genres (97).

autobiography and trauma narrative should be labeled to stress and to encompass better authors' writing processes and purposes.

The term 'autobiography' becomes a 'problem' for those who engage with the topic mainly because of its many names. What constitutes as autobiography? But is that text also autofiction? Or even autography?⁶⁴ Indeed, specificity to each can be, and has been, outlined, but what remains important for my purpose is this idea that there are multiple names that scholars use. By naming and re-naming a genre depending on specific needs, scholars merely add to the open-endedness of a genre that is already 'too much' to fully and completely outline, 'too much' to contain even within one name.

Such multiplicity is appealing because it results in flexibility, and it is even true to the genre's characteristics—traits that stress openness and fluidity. Specifically, Smith and Watson explain that autobiography emphasizes a “nonlinear narrative, fragmented textuality, relationality, the authority of experience” (*Writing*, 40). Such a form has been referred to as an “outlaw genre” by Caren Kaplan to stress the resistance.⁶⁵ And such a form has been one of “the ‘female form[s]’...[which] created a space where the traditional ordering of narrative and meaning could be undone” (Anderson 34). Indeed, ‘traditional’ conceptions have been ‘undone’—to an extent. But the multiple names and the focus on ‘outlaw’ further complicate matters by reinforcing difference and inferiority in comparison to other genres.

⁶⁴ Autofiction has its roots in French origins and exists in regards to the idea that “no definitive truth about the past self may be available” while autography focuses on narrative “instability” (Smith & Watson, *Reading*, 186). Smith and Watson in *Reading* attribute autography to Jeanne Perreault, who “used this term to characterize the instability of both the ‘I’ and the category ‘woman’ in feminist narratives” (186). I should note here that autobiography, in general, is commonly linked to scholar Gusdorf, who “is often identified as the dean of autobiographical studies”—as Susan Friedman explains in her article “Women’s Autobiographical Selves Theory and Practice” (34).

⁶⁵ This issue of resistance will be explored further in the following chapter. (Caren Kaplan. “Resisting Autobiography: Out-Law Genres and Transnational Feminist Subjects.” In *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*. Eds. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. [Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998: 208-216].)

In fact, some critics recognize the term ‘autobiography’ as tainted and refuse to use it completely. Autobiographical scholar, Sonia C. Apgar notes her resistance to the term in her dissertation titled *Writing (for) Our Lives: (Auto)Biography as Contestatory Practice*: “Rather than using the term ‘autobiography’ [because of its inferior position in the canon], I will use the term ‘life-writing’ ...to keep at the forefront the notions of retrospectively (re)writing and (re)defining one’s life” (15). Positioning her choice in lines with her (feminist) efforts, Apgar engages with the debate on terminology—a debate that exists throughout the field.

Apgar is not the only scholar who prefers life-writing over autobiography. In fact, well-known autobiographical scholar James Olney makes note of his preference of using life-writing over autobiography in his text titled *Memory & Narrative: The Weave of Life-Writing*. And many critics feel the same because this *is* “a more inclusive term” (Kadar 4).⁶⁶ But even this term attempts to ‘box’ that which is ‘too much’ to do so. Thus, the genre’s very name lacks consistency, becoming a sort of literary ‘problem’—existing as ‘too much’ to explain, ‘too much’ to ‘box’ into one definition, one name. But simply renaming autobiography to life-writing does little to change the matter. Rather, I stress that re-naming the genre should work towards reinterpretation and reinvention of the genre itself.

I am not interrogating the use of the term life-writing—as I argue that replacing autobiography with it is effective. Rather, I insist that such relabeling bridges two significant entities that are lost when critics focus on the autobiographical product/text. These two entities are ‘life’ and ‘writing’—joined by a hyphenated bond between—creating an overarching emphasis on life experiences as well as the creative *act* of writing. Thus, the fiction produced *remains* linked to both purpose and process with the term ‘life-writing.’

⁶⁶ Kadar further notes, “What is not always revealed in the scholarship about autobiographical writing...is that for a part of the eighteenth century, before the Greek and Latin rooted words ‘biography’ and ‘autobiography’ fell into current usage, the Anglo-Saxon rooted phrase ‘life-writing’ was popular” (4).

Suzette Henke further explains the term ‘life-writing’ as a means “to challenge the traditional limits of autobiography through the use of a category that encompasses memoirs, diaries, letters, and journals” (xiii, my emphasis). And even trauma narratives. Such a ‘challenge [to] the traditional limits of autobiography’ is needed. However, I assert that there is a careful balance that must be reached—as we, as scholars, do not want to erase the individual traits of the sub-genres within life-writing. In other words, I fear that Henke’s use of the term may be too inclusive, resulting in a loss of individual purposes and processes for each sub-genre.⁶⁷

In other words, ‘trauma narratives’ should not be classified as *just* ‘life-writing.’ With such a classification, something is ignored. Something is sidelined. Something is lost. And that something is (ironically) the trauma itself—that ‘extraordinary’ entity that alters both one’s *life* and one’s *writing*. Thus, life-writing holds the potential to be a ‘safe/r’ classification when identifying other genres within this larger one. However, I insist that life-writing as a label for the larger genre should not replace individual categories, as each has its own purposes and processes—especially when the life is ‘extraordinary’ because of the trauma that one had experienced, the trauma that will never be entirely grasped, that trauma that is as individual as the author who writes about it.

For this reason, I recognize that writings sparked by trauma should be able to exist on their own, as well as within a larger whole. To emphasize, they should not be classified as *simply* life-writing—as doing so removes the ‘trauma.’ I turn to the definition of ‘trauma narrative’ to stress the need for distinction. Autobiographical scholars Smith and Watson define this as “[a] mode of writing the unspeakable” (*Reading*, 206). This distinctive genre under the

⁶⁷ In addition to life-writing, Henke does use the terms “trauma story” and “narratives of recovery” (xviii, xxii). Henke’s interchanging of the terms may demonstrate the genre’s multiplicity, but it also complicates the individuality of a life-writing genre that (r)evolves around trauma.

life-writing umbrella differentiates itself from others with the focus on ‘the unspeakable.’ In addition, such a trait implies the impossible, in an ‘impossible’ genre. Furthermore, such a trait is complicated due to the fact that ‘the unspeakable’ is subjective.

Thus, scholars may all too often group these narratives into a category with every other life-writing narrative, de-emphasizing how traumatizing trauma is, sidelining the process and purpose of writing. However, naming these writings as ‘trauma narratives’ is not without its own set of problems. As explained, this term stresses the ‘impossibility’ and subjectivity of the genre.⁶⁸ In addition, I argue that it simultaneously creates too much of an emphasis on the *trauma*, highlighting the wound and forever branding the author and the text with the *trauma*. Such a name remains problematic.

This same genre has been referred to as narratives of recovery, which better conveys the purpose of the genre. Now, the emphasis is on recovery as opposed to the trauma, and authors write to recover pieces of the self, of one’s past. Suzette Henke explains this best by stating, “The term *narrative recovery*...pivots on a double entendre meant to evoke both the recovery of past experience through narrative articulation and the psychological reintegration of a traumatically shattered subject” (xxii). However, such a label is still problematic due to the emphasis on the ‘self’ and on that self’s ‘recovery’—as if the ‘self’ exists in isolation *and* as if ‘recovery’ had a finite outcome. Neither is the case, and I will expand upon these ideas in the following chapters—offering an alternative label in chapter six, one which embraces this genre’s

⁶⁸ I note that autobiography has been identified as an impossible genre. Benstock affirms that the genre is problematic, noting the impossibility: “[A]utobiography reveals the impossibility of its own dream: what begins on the presumption of self-knowledge ends in the creation of a fiction that covers over the premises of its construction” (11). But this ‘impossibility’ does not have to ignore the process or purpose. Unpacking her statement further, I contend that the initial starting point as ‘self-knowledge’ is limiting—as some authors write to find themselves or to (re)gain control of themselves post-trauma.

‘many things,’ one that links this and its writing in attempts to allow self and others to engage with healing possibilities.

This rhetorical analysis of these phrases serves to highlight that many labels have been created, each with its own implications, boxing in the genre, either avoiding or stressing the trauma. Thus, there is no denying that ‘trauma narratives’ are indeed a sort of ‘Pandora’s Box’ in literary and feminist studies. This is in part because trauma, and engaging with it, is not easy. Escaping definition and unleashing the unknown, the unwanted, writing (about) trauma is—without question—pandoric. But the problem of the genre is also in part because scholars’ efforts to rename, redefine the genre fall short when writing purposes and processes are not stressed.

(Re)Writing Pandora

I assert that literary and feminist scholars should not only reconceptualize the genre but also rewrite the meaning of Pandora and thus, pandoric. Doing so would enable the genre to continue to be referred to as pandoric and the authors as Pandora, albeit for different meanings. Drawing from art therapist McNiff, I advocate for a return to an earlier interpretation of Pandora in order to change viewpoints, accepting the ‘many things’ that encompass the label of Pandora. Such a change does not alter the use of the word Pandora—as associations to her and her myth remain applicable. By referencing Anna O. and engaging with Lev Kenaan’s interpretations of Pandora, I insist that such perceptions of Pandora stress not only the Pandora’s ‘many things’ but also the link to narrating the story, which becomes associated to transgression and creation.

In his book *Écrits*, psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan makes a brief reference to Pandora when speaking about Anna O. and the verbalization of her trauma story during a session. Lacan writes, “[Anna O.] simply recounts the event...I would say that she verbalizes it, or—to further

exploit this term whose resonances in French call to mind a Pandora figure other than the one with the box (in which the term should probably be locked up)—that she forces the event into the Word” (47).⁶⁹ Here, Lacan does not relegate Anna O. into the commonly known problematic Pandora image with a box, claiming she should ‘lock up’ her story. Rather, he recognizes that she brought her story into existence through the act of verbalization—which is what labels her as a Pandora. Furthermore, Lacan positions this act as one that is dependent on the other, as “[s]he does this in a language that allows her discourse to be understood by her contemporaries” (47). Thus, the verbalization of the story must be framed in a way that others can understand, a sort of “speech [that] is performed” (Lacan 47).

This connection to speech, to rhetoric is also made by scholar Lev Kenaan, the author of titled *Pandora’s Senses: The Feminine Character of the Ancient Text*. She explains that Pandora is represented as “the figure of rhetoric” (21).⁷⁰ Furthermore, Lev Kenaan asserts, “Pandora’s nature can be found in any woman who in speaking transgresses the boundaries of her gender” (104). Thus, the act of sharing her trauma story creates a parallel with Pandora—for Anna O., or rather, Bertha Pappenheim, or any woman who chooses to speak, to write, to story her trauma.

A story that is filled with events,
with fragments that may sometimes be unexplainable,
sometimes contradictory,
and sometimes ambiguous.

A story that is filled with ‘many things.’

⁶⁹ Lacan’s statement and reference to Pandora need further exploration, but is out of the immediate scope of this project. However, the following translator’s note may benefit a project on this connection: “*Verbaliser* (verbalize)...means to book (or report) someone, but it also means to talk too much or too long. *Pandore* (Pandora), in addition to referring to the Greek mythology figure, is somewhat old slang term for a policeman” (324).

⁷⁰ Engaging with literary scholar Pucci, Lev Kenaan notes that “[Pandora] marks...the emergence of rhetoric [and] Pucci interprets Pandora as the figure of rhetoric, underscoring her centrality to the history of writing” (21).

These ‘many things’ are embedded within this concept and acceptance of ambiguity. After all, Pandora is “the symbol of ambiguity” (Vernant qtd in Lev Kenaan 19). As Lev Kenaan writes, “[Pandora has a] dichotomous nature, emphasizing the crucial set of tensions that she embodies: between body and soul, outside and inside, lies and truth, human and bestial, as well as human and divine” (19). Such a ‘dichotomous nature’ refuses to relegate Pandora to only evil, to only beauty, to only the body, to only the mind. Rather, “[s]he manifests a hybrid form called *kalon kakon*..., a ‘beautiful evil’ ...[that] is never apparent...[but rather] always remains ambiguous” (86). Eluding definitive depiction. This is not to say that ‘evil’ does not exist at all. Thus, the idea that Pandora unleashes evil is not entirely wrong, but it is not entirely right. Evil exists. But its existence is not without beauty—for there is a dual weaving of the two. Furthermore, Pandora is simultaneously both the ‘whole’ idea of beauty and evil as well as the individual ‘parts’ of beauty and of evil. Negotiating among these unique and unified components, Pandora easily mediates her position because she is “the bearer *par excellence* of this duality” (Lev Kenaan 89). Lev Kenaan explains that the very creation of Pandora, body and soul, is representative of this:

Pandora is created from clay, which is a mixture of two components, water and earth...In shaping her character, the gods created a two-faced figure. On the one hand, she is given the virginal and innocent countenance of a beautiful young maiden. On the other hand...Pandora is elaborately skilled in talking and weaving, and is equipped with all sorts of erotic gifts and seductive techniques (88).⁷¹

⁷¹ This ‘seductive’ nature is further explained by Lev Kenaan: “The naming of the first woman occurs while the spectators...are gazing at her. The name ‘Pandora’ is thus tied to her visibility, indicating that visibility is the essence of woman. Visual appearance is the mark of the feminine...[And] the meaning of the word ‘woman’ derives from the idiomatic and imagistic responses that Pandora’s beauty invokes” (36). She continues to note that “[o]ne of the more conspicuous elements in the Pandora episode is the recurrent use of *thauma*, ‘wonder’”—invoking a seductive lure (36).

Such an interpretation of Pandora opens up the possibilities for flux, plurality, and ambiguity when stories are associated with this mythical figure.

Furthermore, such a reinvention of Pandora better prevents a one-sided, incomplete, and even misinterpreted idea of what Pandora represents. As Lev Kenaan affirms, “Pandora is [unfortunately] made to carry the feminine responsibility for human misery” (35). But such an interpretation boxes her into one image, an image that results in her losing her hybrid nature and her creative abilities to move between and among dual and conflicting entities—stressing her only as the bearer of evils. Indeed, such unilateral perspectives remove her ‘feminine beauty’—an aspect that should always be associated to any Pandora reference, an aspect that links Pandora to ambiguity, creation, verbalization, and transgression.

In her text, Lev Kenaan emphasizes Pandora’s ‘feminine beauty,’ an attribute that is significant when rewriting Pandora as representing ‘many things,’ as encompassing and embracing her ‘feminine beauty.’ According to Lev Kenaan, “Feminine beauty cannot...be understood as mere externality...[and] always hints at something beyond itself, at the presence of something invisible” (89). This “feminine entanglement of showing and concealing, of visible and invisible” resonates with the topic of trauma as well as with the *act* writing (about) trauma (Lev Kenaan 89).

To understand better how women writing their trauma become a metaphoric Pandora and how their writings express this pandoric ‘feminine beauty,’ I turn to Canadian author Sylvia Fraser in the next section.

Fraser overtly creates a connection among herself,
her trauma story,
and the mythical image of Pandora.

Writing Pandora and Accepting Her ‘Many Things’ as ‘Feminine Beauty’

One day in 1971, the book that never would be finished is finished. At 255 pages, it exists as an entity separate from me, with the circumstance of its creation still more or less a mystery to me. I title it Pandora after the mortal who, in classical mythology, was created by Zeus as the first woman. Like the biblical Eve, Pandora unlooses a plague of ills by touching the forbidden—by opening a box.
- Fraser (151-152)

Associating the writing of her trauma story with ‘touching the forbidden’ and ‘opening [up] a box [of ills],’ Fraser situates herself not only as the unilateral image of Pandora against which I argue but also as a woman who knows that her content matter is risky. Furthermore, I insist that Fraser’s connection to this mythical figure is a fortunate happenstance. In this section, I identify Fraser as the reconceptualized Pandora by analyzing her text in relation to this mythical figure and her symptoms of trauma. Next, I focus on how her writing relieves her symptoms while simultaneously becoming an example of ‘feminine beauty,’ of her ‘many thing,’ using a writing style that is closer to the trauma itself.

Fraser’s book-length narrative on her traumatic experience is one of the first recognized texts by a woman to engage with the socially taboo topic of incest. For this reason, Fraser is correct to link herself with ‘the first [mythical] woman,’ who is thought of as the mother of all women. Thus, I argue that her fiction *Pandora*, published in 1972, opens up a space for women to engage with such unspeakable topics. Furthermore, her fiction precedes her 1988 memoir titled *My Father’s House: A Memoir of Incest and Healing*, which further engages with both her childhood abuse and her act of writing, of narrating her traumatic experiences into a story. In addition, she even dedicates an entire chapter titled “Pandora’s Box” to (the writing of) her text that she published over fifteen years earlier.

Fraser's memoir is a testimony that her trauma story flirts with concealing and revealing from the opening lines. By positioning herself as having 'secrets,' Fraser immediately captures her readers' curiosity. In addition, Fraser emphasizes these 'secrets' with her own lack of language. At first. To explain better, I turn to Fraser's opening lines. She writes, "*My daddy and I...*" (Fraser 5, her ellipses and italics).⁷² Literally, the first time, Fraser attempts to reveal 'trauma,' she cannot and remains silent. The trauma is literally concealed with the ellipses, showing that something is not said, something is 'unspeakable.' Something is contained, locked away from her readers. Such a textual act yields the implication that Fraser continues to view her story, her trauma as simply 'too much' to share.

But she tells her story.

Fraser continues, slowly unfolding her 'secrets' and the details of her childhood abuse. Thus, the next time Fraser writes, "*My daddy and I share secrets*" (6). Still stressing the 'secret' nature of it all, Fraser's words and narrative progression imply that she has had to keep it all 'contained,' has had to keep it all 'locked' away, has had to keep it all 'boxed' up. In fact, Fraser's method of working with her trauma (memories that I stress are *both* concealed and revealed post-trauma to the individual who experienced the trauma) is representative as memories that are not always accessible, that may never be fully accessible, remaining somewhat detached from her 'self.' Fraser exemplifies this through the creation of 'another self,' a self that she calls Pandora in her first text and an 'other' self that she creates through the use of an italic stylistic in this one.

Although written over a decade apart, Fraser's two texts invite links. Besides the obvious—the fact that one is the fictional account of her past, while the other is her nonfiction—

⁷² The fact that the italics and ellipses are hers is important note because of what the two represent. The ellipses imply a lack of language while the italics represent a shift in textual voice.

the two act as pieces to a larger whole. Such is right in line with the story of Pandora. The ancient text of Pandora indicates that multiple texts *are* parts of a larger story. Indeed, Jean-Pierre Vernant, a classical scholar of the seventies, is the first to acknowledge that Pandora “was a key figure in the construction of the myth’s logic...[which means that] her story [can be read] as an inherent part of a sequence of episodes” (Lev Kenaan 19). Engaging with Vernant, Lev Kenaan explains that “[a]fter Vernant, Pandora could no longer be read in isolation (in and of itself) as an autonomous myth...[because] [Vernant’s] strategy reveals the complex mythological network created by Hesiod’s two poems and, more specifically, the interrelated functions of the two Pandoras in constructing a mythical picture of the human condition” (19). Thus, Pandora and her ‘story’ actually exist in the plural and within relational intersections. And like Pandora’s stories, Fraser’s stories are interconnected with other stories, namely with each other.

More so, Fraser engages with her plurality—not just within her textual re-invention of what occurred in her childhood, but also throughout her latter text with the stylistics. Disrupting the narrative structure by overtly creating another character and representing this ‘other’ in italics, Fraser engages with ‘another self’—one that is interrelated with the other. She writes,

[S]omewhere around the age of seven, I acquired another self with memories and experiences separate from mine, whose existence was unknown to me. My loss of memory was retroactive. I did not remember my daddy ever having touched me sexually. I did not remember ever seeing my daddy naked. I did not remember my daddy ever seeing me naked...She loved my father, freeing me to hate him. She became his guilty sex partner and my mother’s jealous rival...She knew everything about me. I knew nothing about her. Like estranged but fatal lovers, we were psychically attuned. She

telegraphed messages to me through the dreams we shared. She leaked emotions to me through the body we shared (15).

I quote Fraser's passage at length because of the richness of her text and how it directly refers to common symptoms that individuals may experience due to traumatic experiences. Thus, I acknowledge that her 'plural selves' are a defense mechanism, attempting to protect her 'self' from the trauma. Thus, this rupture (or splitting/shattering/damaging) of the self is a dissociation from the trauma.⁷³ 'She'—not Fraser—experienced the unspeakable, the unthinkable.

Furthermore, Fraser's words highlight that trauma affects one's memories as mentioned in chapter one. '[She] did not remember' what had happened. Rather, her 'body' did; her 'dreams' did. They told her, as these traumatic experiences are not like her 'ordinary' experiences. As mentioned in the previous chapter, traumatic memories are stored in fragments, stored in a different realm of consciousness, trauma memories do not always make sense, returning as snippets of an unknown story, as unexplainable emotions, as unknown reactions. This is because trauma, when experienced, is often more than the 'self' can handle.

Thus, the trauma is 'too much' to bear.

So Fraser creates 'another self,' a pandoric image to take on this role that she cannot.

Ironically, this 'other' self takes on multiple functions, protecting Fraser as a child, becoming a connector between past and present, and simultaneously blurring the unified image of the 'self.' All the while, this 'other' self, this Pandora exemplifies the Greek mythological image—not because she is 'too much' to bear, but because of her 'many things.' She, like Lev Kenaan's explanation of Pandora, is a representation of dualities, contradictions, and ambiguities—of 'feminine beauty.' She exists 'between body and soul, outside and inside, lies

⁷³ Henke, engaging with Herman, explains "the strategic adaptation of a 'double self' [often exists] in response to childhood sexual abuse" (125-126).

and truth, human and bestial.’ Furthermore, she is ‘skilled in talking and weaving’—skilled in sharing trauma’s story.

Lev Kenaan further expands on Pandora, referring to her as “*thauma idesthai*, ‘a wonder to see’” (45, 41). Lev Kenaan uses this phrase to refer “Pandora’s radiant appearance” and her alluring nature (41). But my connecting this phrase to Fraser and her story holds the purpose of juxtaposing trauma with this alluring seduction—as trauma, too, does have a ‘seductive’ power. As I have previously mentioned, individuals tend to be attracted to and repelled by past wounds. They tend to want to conceal yet desire to reveal. They tend to flirt with the unknown while remaining unsure of what action to take. Even Fraser asserts that she was seduced by her traumatic memories: “I find myself attracted to my childhood haunts. Lured by memories...” (147). Pulled to ‘open’ the ‘box’ and engage with her ‘forbidden’ memories.

This ‘box’ becomes a ‘wonder to see’ for Fraser with, in, and through her *act of writing* her Pandora story. Her ‘evils’ existed—but not without their ‘beauty’ of creation, their ‘beauty’ of writing acts. Fraser mentions that she found “catharsis” through writing (149). In fact, Fraser explains this ‘feminine beauty,’ this *release* (through unleashing her past) in depth in her text while stressing that she fell into moments of creative flow, being completely engaged with her act of creation, losing track of time, losing part of her ‘self’ while finding another:

Writing has never come easily to me but now that the words have taken a highly personal turn, my fingers fly. *My other self has learned to type. She presses my keys, throwing up masses of defiant memories—stream-of-consciousness stuff without punctuation, semi-sentences and then whole paragraphs scrolling out of my typewriter. Days melt into weeks. Weeks slide into months. Fall hardens into winter then lightens into spring* (149, her italics).

This creative act is not without pain. As Fraser indicates, “I’m not just recalling the past but reliving it with an appropriate accompaniment of grief, pain, relief some laughter, even exhilaration” (150). Thus, in writing her trauma, Fraser creates a ‘feminine beauty’ that encompasses both insight and pain while allowing her to negotiate between her past and present worlds, creating a sort of conduit between her conscious and unconscious worlds through the act, the movement of writing: “As I write, the world inside my head becomes more real than the physical world; feelings become more real than facts; thoughts more real than spoken words; my unconscious mind more real than my conscious mind; the visionary world of dreams more real than the waking world” (150). Existing between and among entities and encompassing her ‘many things.’

And despite the evils, despite the fact that “[t]he reconstruction of the trauma is never completed,” Fraser negotiates her worlds, her selves, by engaging with her ‘double self’ and by re-creating one of her many stories over and over with two distinctly different texts (Herman 195). Indeed, Fraser negotiates her trauma by creating ‘feminine beauty’ out of her pain.

This story is pandoric. For ‘many’ reasons.

This story emphasizes Pandora’s visibility and invisibility,
her wonder, her ‘many things.’

Like my ‘Pandora’ self.

My ‘pandoric’ story.

My Pandora Story

My pandoric self did not emerge as a double self, a shadow self, posing as a fictional character in a textual story. In fact, there are no words attributed to this Pandora story. Rather, she materialized as an image, as the color red. Representing my blood. My torn heart.

I was in pain. Not exactly sure of what I was doing, what I was creating.

All I knew was that I had to move. I had to release the unwanted feelings somehow.

I did not want to write.

I do not think that this was because I lacked the ‘words’ or because I was stunned into a ‘traumatic’ state. I merely feel as if the words I needed, the words I wanted were (and are) so detached from my vocabulary that nothing I said (textually or verbally) could accurately represent this ‘me’ that I was at that particular moment.

I could not yell, could not scream.

At me. At him. At everyone. At no one.

I was broken beyond repair.⁷⁴ And the only color I saw was red.

Sitting down on my floor, I spread out my paint, turned up the radio as loud as I could bear, and began my creation. Allowing Pandora to share all of her redness, all of her hurtful pain with me. Through the repetition of my fingers going back and forth over a piece of canvas. All the while, I cried.

This was a couple days after the last time I saw him, a couple days after the last time he hurt me. I am not sure how many days afterwards. I just know it was after...

And I know that I was in a lot of pain that day.

A lot of doubt.

A lot of confusion.

Not really about him.

Or about us.

I knew... I knew there was no more ‘us.’

⁷⁴ This is a direct reference to an Ingrid Michaelson song “Be OK.” Her lyrics include the following: “Open me up, and you will see / I’m a gallery of broken hearts / I’m beyond repair; let me be / And give me back my broken parts.” (Independent [Recording] Artist, 2008.)

Maybe the red represented the blood of ‘our’ death.

I did not want to stop finger-painting.

I enjoyed the motion, the creation of it all.

But I remember looking at the image through my tears and feeling as if something more existed, something else could (and should) emerge, something more than my wounds. It was then that I switched colors.⁷⁵

And the ‘feminine beauty’ surfaced.

A flower.

Something that has potential for growth.



This image is me.

No words.

No text.

Just color.

Silent, yet very telling.

Revealing, while simultaneously concealing, my pain.

People see it and compliment it, but few know the story behind its creation. This image becomes representative of my Pandora, my unconscious ‘self’ who silently whispered to me that I can, and do, exist within my ‘many things’—and my stories are not ‘too much’ to bear.

Rather, they remain ‘a wonder to see.’ A ‘feminine beauty.’

⁷⁵ As a personal project, I blog a ‘yearly review’ where I reflect on all of my significant moments, spanning the entire year, moving from month to month, and describing what I learned. This painting was so moving to me that it appeared in 2007’s yearly review. I wrote, “I learned that loud music and lots of paint can produce a colorful flower over all the broken pieces” (Spear, Blog).

The Pandoric Image of Trauma

I mention my personal pandoric story to emphasize that there is yet another problem when it comes to writing a trauma story—and this is the fact that the traumatic experiences may not translate immediately with words or in a linear fashion. Rather, trauma may be expressed through non-verbal methods. In fact, as Karen Estrella re-affirms in her article titled “Expressive Therapy: An Integrated Arts Approach,”

In recent years, researchers have discovered that traumatic memories are not organized via a narrative, and that traumatized individuals are initially unable to arrange these memories in words or symbols. Instead, these traumatic memories are stored as somatic sensations, emotional vulnerabilities, flashbacks and nightmares, dissociative inclinations, and behavioral reenactments (188).

Thus, the unconscious may turn to the non-narrative (or poetic narrative forms) in order to bridge, weave between past and present, between visible and invisible.

In this section, I first engage with Fraser’s pandoric story to demonstrate that stories and images are intimately connected in trauma stories. Next, I draw from art therapists such as Shaun McNiff to argue that the reconceptualization of Pandora, which stresses her ‘many things’ and ‘feminine beauty,’ bridges the non-narrative and narrative forms. Such a move connects to both the creative and feminine *processes*—refusing to focus solely on objectified, textual analyses of the *product* alone—and is expanded in the following chapter.

Fraser’s texts do not exist as only linear narratives that depict her traumatic past. Rather, her trauma story is also linked to sensations, dreams, flashbacks—as explained. But more than just noting these symptoms, Fraser stresses that pre-narrative, she found herself unconsciously sketching out her Pandoric image, noting her innate (and even confusing) connection to this

image. Writing about her days that preexisted her fictional, textual account of her trauma, Fraser acknowledges her unconscious pictorial association to her childhood trauma—her trauma that originally surfaced in the guise of an image: “Back in Toronto, I now frequently catch myself doodling—during editorial meetings, on the phone, at my typewriter. When I look down, I discover [my childhood teddy bear] Teddy Umcline with a pregnant belly” (148).

This image did not map out a clear story. In fact, the meaning behind it was not obvious. And it was up to Fraser to analyze effectively her ‘double self,’ her Pandora self, a ‘self’ that (first) emerges through this repeated pictorial presence, a presence that simultaneously conceals.⁷⁶

Images contain stories.

Stories contain images.

Depending upon each other, both images and stories work together not only to produce meaning but also to access memories, feelings that are distanced from words for whatever reason. More specifically,

The arts are uniquely beneficial in their capacity to access experience, thoughts, and feelings that do not depend exclusively on either verbal language or narrative discourse. This is not to say that art-based communication is exclusively nonverbal, but rather...[relies] on sensory-based, image-based expression [proving] the arts have something to offer (Estrella 188).

And vice versa. In fact, it is commonly understood that non-narrative and narrative communication should go hand-in-hand. In a dissertation titled *Being Present in Language: A Comparison of Therapy and Journal Structures with Implications for Teaching Writing*, Anne R. Whitney engages with this idea: “Most therapists including Jung indicate, however, that non-

⁷⁶ Therapists often point out that interpretation, significance should come from the patient.

verbal experience alone is incomplete and that it is in the linkage of nonverbal to verbal that consciousness or insight is attained” (97).

Because of the potential of engaging with these matters, images and expressions of any kind should not be boxed away, discredited as ‘too much’ to bear. Too often, they are—especially when they are confusing, unexplained, and many. As art therapist McNiff insists that society’s appeal to order results in a resistance to the ‘many things’ of Pandora’s original image. McNiff writes, “The linear mind does not respond favorably to the *stream of images and sensations flowing* from Pandora’s original ‘vase,’ which later became a ‘box’” (151, my emphasis).

Because of this, there may be resistance to return to an earlier interpretation of Pandora, a resistance to embrace her ‘many things,’ her ambiguity and multiplicity. But little is achieved when solely avoiding, ignoring, resisting. But when recognizing that her textual product emerges because of her ‘many things,’ literary scholars better explore the process behind and beyond the text. Such a process is a *creative process* that incorporates using multiple forms of expression, multiple senses and images to create one of many narratives.

Such a process uses an intermodal approach of creation. As McNiff explains, an intermodal approach embraces the ‘many things’ affecting and associated with the creative processes while also being open to incorporate the ‘many things’ that act as inspiration—refusing to ‘box’ process and creation into one category, one method. Such an approach allows individuals to work with and through confusions using multiple modes of expression.⁷⁷

Specifically, this approach is defined as an incorporation of “two or more expressive therapies to

⁷⁷ This method developed around 1978 and is commonly linked to art therapist Paulo Knill (Estrella 184; McNiff 151).

foster awareness, encourage emotional growth, and enhance relationships with others”
(Malchiodi, *Expressive*, 3).

By thinking of writing (about) trauma as a form of intermodal expression, both authors and literary scholars better work towards “learning how to move with [Pandoric content] in creative and ever-changing ways” (McNiff 152). Such links to creative processes behind the product enable literary scholars to move beyond some of the problems associated with the pandoric, life-writing genre commonly known as trauma narratives.

In other words, the ‘impossible’ genre of ‘trauma narratives’ becomes possible when taking the process, the multiple, the ‘feminine beauty’ into account. Doing so, we, as scholars and as a society, can better work with and through pandoric memories—ours and others’—which we may view as ‘too much’ to bear at first, but in actuality encompass a ‘feminine beauty’ in which we should explore, engaging with creative and intermodal processes that may be closer to the trauma.⁷⁸

And Sylvia Fraser did just that. Using her ‘multisensory activity,’ Fraser writes her Pandoric stories, engaging with her ‘feminine beauty.’

And in doing so, Fraser found her voice. She writes, “Through Pandora, my other self has acquired a *voice*” (153, my emphasis). Her trauma spoke to her, and she uses it to speak to others. She found her ‘other voice,’ but it was a voice that strengthened her own. In addition, it is a voice that would lead others to theirs—opening up a space for other trauma stories to emerge, empowering others to speak, to voice their wounds.

⁷⁸ I should note that ‘intermodal’ expression is not limited to the final product being demonstrative that the artist, the creator engaged with multiple mediums, multiple forms of expression. Yes, “[w]hen multiple art forms are used, we are more apt to experience ourselves making free gestures within a supportive environment of expression” (McNiff 154). But the ‘multiples’ are also found within all forms of creative expression when one is actively engaged, better attuned, and more open to moving with, through, and beyond their images and emotions. As McNiff writes, “[A]rtistic disciplines [overlook] how every medium of expression requires multisensory activity” (152). Thus, a key to unlocking this ‘multisensory activity’ rests in the (feminine) process of creating.

Fraser's voice was not 'restrained.'

Furthermore, her voice embodies "the language of multiplicity,

always at play with concealments and dissimulations" (Lev Kenaan 133).

Always one voice yet simultaneously representing many voices.

For these reasons, Fraser *is* Pandora, 'transgress[ing] the boundaries of her gender.'

In addition to speaking out, to writing out, Pandora is more than an image of language.

She is also an image of love. A love for self, a love for others, a desire to change. As Lev Kenaan asserts, "Pandora is not merely a gifted speaker. Her language is a manifestation of the invincible force of *eros*." And it is this '*eros*' that should be viewed as being behind and beyond the text when writing (about) trauma.

It is this love that has been her impetus, propelling her voice to emerge.

This voice may have surfaced because she 'opened up Pandora's box,' so to say, but this voice became her own by engaging with her creative processes, processes that were transformative to her 'self' and processes that will hopefully transform others. In the following chapter, I will expand upon '[h]er language,' noting that this language is feminine *and* creative.

4 FEMININE CREATIVITY: MOVING BEYOND WOUNDS AND WORDS

The creative process has a feminine quality.

- Jung (430)

The previous chapter argues that stories of trauma encompass *pandoric* qualities, a ‘feminine beauty’ better allowing women to ‘transgress’ their marginality and positions of oppression by not focusing solely on wounds and victimization. Rather, women and their stories of trauma are more. Furthermore, the chapter not only stresses the idea that women who write their stories of trauma engage with their ‘feminine beauty’ but also concludes with the notion that women write these stories of trauma in a language that contains an ‘invincible force of *eros*.’ But what exactly is this ‘force,’ this ‘language’ that mediates among the ‘many things’ when trauma, genre, and gender are intertwined?

Building upon the previous chapter’s idea that ‘feminine beauty’ encompasses the ‘many things’—the order and disorder, the pictorial and textual—I now expand upon women writing trauma by focusing on the *writing*. I argue that Cixous’s *l’écriture féminine*, which is often referred to as either the feminine language or the feminine style of writing, assists these women in not only writing trauma but also *moving* beyond wounds and words. To do so, I first define *l’écriture féminine*, claiming that it mediates many of the ‘problems’ of ‘trauma narratives’ by women authors because of its definition, which is also a *lack* of a definition. To make this claim, I engage primarily with literary and feminist critic Hélène Cixous to stress that writing in this style is more than the common juxtaposition against the man-made language that victimizes women authors, inadvertently highlighting a gendered placement of inferiority. Furthermore, I turn to both Virginia Woolf and Rachel Blau DuPlessis to argue that *the act of creating* is lost when scholars focus arguments too much on gender and the body, too much on resistance, too much on ‘breaking’—negative connotations that stress the wounds and being wounded.

Rather, women and their stories of trauma should be viewed as being individuals who are both active and creative, engaging with their femininity and creativity, two entities that may lack definitive explanations, but two entities that allow possibilities to emerge when writing trauma. Furthermore, I build upon the last chapter's implications of creative flow by contending that there is a link between creative processes and femininity, which flows, which not only encompasses a fluid state that mediates between the narrative and non-narrative but also represents an amalgamation of body, mind, and creative spirit—three entities that are all too often disjointed. To highlight these links, claiming that such writing styles connect to more than the body, I engage with psychoanalytic discourse, examining how Lacan and Jung add insight with this trauma topic. In addition, I assert that feminine writing is closer to the trauma (the memories, the images) and that feminine writing better *moves* with the traumatic interpretation and the *act* of creation—taking both mind and creative spirit into account. I conclude this chapter by offering an analysis of Gloria Anzaldúa's story, of her text to assert that feminine writing, feminine language, feminine creating *moves*... With its circular, nonlinear structure... It moves... *moving* the writer beyond wounds and beyond words, allowing the entire self to engage in the act of creating anew... in the act of creating post-trauma...

A Feminine Language

Before I engage with the act of creating anew, I must first define feminine writing. Grounded in Lacanian theory, *l'écriture féminine* is best identified with French feminism and feminists, namely with Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva. Furthermore, feminine writing is often equated with a feminine language—one that is “apart from patriarchal discourse, a language with the potential to create its own meanings” (Worthington 110). Such an idea of a feminine language evolved in literary and feminist studies in the mid-seventies and is commonly

attributed to Hélène Cixous and her call for women ‘to break’ out of the oppression associated with writing in a male-centered, man-made language. This section engages with this writing style and its limitations in order to re-envision its possibilities.

Positioning herself, all other women, and all of their writing in relation to her male counterpart, Cixous, in her well-known article “The Laugh of the Medusa,” writes the following:

...I speak of male writing. I maintain unequivocally that there is such a thing as *marked* writing; that, until now, far more extensively and repressively than is ever suspected or admitted, writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural—hence political, typically masculine—economy...where woman has never *her* turn to speak...Nearly the entire history of writing is confounded with the history of reason...It has been one with the phallogentric tradition. It is indeed that same self-admiring, self-stimulating, self-congratulatory phallogentrism... (2042-2043).⁷⁹

These words preface the development of a theory that advocates for women to develop a different language, for women to write her subjectivity, disrupt patriarchal order, and move out of the object(ified) position, and Cixous claims that this is done by writing in a feminine language, a woman’s language of her own, a woman’s language that is best known as *l’écriture féminine*. Furthermore, these words highlight that women and their stories *have been* silenced—a point that has been stressed throughout this dissertation. But I reiterate it here because of Cixous’s link between writing and ‘the history of reason’—a link to which women did not have access. Thus, when the topic is trauma—a topic that lacks a reasonable explanation—women

⁷⁹ The editor points out that Cixous contradicts her claims by insisting upon the two ideas of female body parts while explaining both genders can write in this style (2037). Thus, tensions between feminine qualities and the female gender exist—as do contradictions within the claims regarding this writing stylistic. Furthermore, as explained in *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*, there is an interesting link between Woolf and Cixous, adding depth to this chapter and my claims: “Woolf’s stylistic experiments anticipate French theorist Hélène Cixous’s” (1248).

writing trauma engage with the unreasonable more than ever. Such an idea is at odds with what can be construed as masculine logic—but is in line with the pandoric, with ‘feminine beauty,’ *and* with feminine writing.

Cixous explains, “It is impossible to define a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded—which doesn’t mean that it doesn’t exist. But it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallogentric systems...” (2046). Cixous defines a feminine style of writing with the lack of a definition, insisting that ‘this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded.’ Thus, it is inaccurate to claim that *l’écriture féminine* lacks a definition, as it has one—one that ironically is dependent upon the very masculine language against which it is writing. However, Cixous mediates these contradictions by defining feminine language as existing within contradictions, within abstractions, and within fluidity. Thus, it is neither completely containable nor entirely definable.

I stress that literary and feminist scholars *do* define *l’écriture féminine*, and the definition becomes one that adamantly situates its language as “a language that will counterpose masculine linearity and ‘phallic’ closure with openness of fluidity” (Worthington 110). As Christine Makward defines it, this feminine language is “open, nonlinear, unfinished, fluid, exploded, fragmented, polysemic” (qtd in Baym 203). Makward continues by explaining that it “[attempts] to speak the body, i.e., the unconscious, involving silence, incorporating the simultaneity of life as opposed to or clearly different from pre-conceived, oriented, masterly of ‘didactic’ language” (qtd in Baym 203). Robbins confirms that *l’écriture féminine* aims to avoid fixity while literally embodying the female body (172). Such definitions are vital in understanding the stylistics behind feminine writing—a style that often is abstract, circular, and repetitious and that lacks

textual closure.⁸⁰ A style that is beneficial when women write trauma. However, such definitions are not without their faults.

Stressing its indefinable nature, its openness and fluidity, feminine writing holds the potential of being too abstract, too focused on the female body, too determined to resist the dominant structure—all aspects that become problematic in literary and feminist discourses. To outline better the common faults associated with this stylistic, I contend the problems of this writing style can be categorized into four points that are too often stressed: the abstractions, gender differences, the body, and resistance. Focusing ‘too much’ on these factors alone neglects to acknowledge the ‘many [other] things’ that should be considered when engaging with this narrative structure. By interrogating and unpacking these limitations, I ultimately insist that such a feminine stylistic is, indeed, ideal when a past traumatic experience is behind the drive of narration because of the possibilities and because of links to creativity.

Limitations of L’Ecriture Feminine

To engage with these limitations in a linear fashion would be difficult for two basic reasons: *l’écriture féminine* is not linear, and no one limitation exists in isolation. Rather, these four are inherently linked. Thus, I will interrogate these faults as a whole, highlighting individual factors when appropriate.

To begin, I stress that Cixous’s *l’écriture féminine* is based on her belief that a woman “must write her self...[as it] will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history” (2043). This statement explains that Cixous predicates the reason for a feminine stylistic with women’s subordinate position alone. In doing so, Cixous simultaneously focuses on women’s inferior role and inability to fully engage with dominant

⁸⁰ To understand closure better, I turn to narratologist H. Porter Abbott, who explains, “When a narrative resolves a conflict, it achieves closure, and this usually comes at the end of the narrative. We expect stories to end” (52).

discourses, emphasizing divides between genders and clinging to a need to ‘break’ the ‘dominant’ structure. Thus, feminine language, or feminine writing, becomes primarily regarded as a form of resistance, a sort of reaction against the dominant structure and what has been labeled as man-made language.

This resistance has been labeled as problematic based the fact that “the call for women to invent their own language is surely utopian within the terms of a world-view in which linguistic predetermination prevails” (Worthington 110-111). Literary scholar Kim L. Worthington continues by attempting to accept that a feminine language of its own is possible; however, she does so just to turn around and debunk it. Worthington writes, “[I]f it is possible for [women] to construct their *own* language, then the first presupposition of such theorizing—namely that we are always the unoriginal construct of dominant language systems—does not hold” (111). Thus, this abstract feminine language exists within the contradiction that language, even feminine language, remains contingent upon the dominant structure.

If this is accurate, then how does *l’écriture féminine* ‘break’ the structure with which it is dependent? The basic answer to which scholars may attach would focus on the notion that *feminine* writing is linked to the *female* body. In fact, Cixous links *l’écriture féminine* with a woman’s body, equating her ‘self’ with her ‘body’: “Write your self. Your body must be heard” (2043). Literary scholar and feminist Kathryn Robson extends the connection of the feminine body and explains that “Cixous implicitly associates *écriture féminine* with the menstruating female body” (53).⁸¹ Robson continues to explain Cixous and feminine writing: “For Cixous, women’s writing flows out of the depths of the body, spills out beyond any attempt to contain it, like menstrual blood” (53). Such an overt connection links ‘women’s writing’ to the *female*

⁸¹ In her text *Writing Wounds: The Inscription of Trauma in Post-1968 French Women’s Life-Writing*, Robson’s “emphasis on ‘writing of the body’...explore[s] how to read the bodily images deployed as a means to articulate psychic wounds” (33).

body. Scholars' tendency to cling to the female body when speaking about *l'écriture féminine* overtly asserts gendered distinctions. And scholars' focus on only the body takes away from the entire self, sidelining both mind and creative spirit. Thus, when feminine writing is relegated to the body alone when trauma is involved, it does not encompass the entire definition of trauma—as explained in chapter two—as trauma affects more than just the body. Furthermore, such an act *limits* the 'many things,' the intermodal creation, and the very 'feminine beauty' that it should represent while being problematic due to both abstraction and resistance.⁸²

Breaking the Limitations of L'Ecriture Feminine

I contend that *l'écriture féminine* should not focus solely on the abstractions, gender differences, the body, and resistance. Doing so depicts it as a mere *reaction* to dominant structures, based fundamentally on a need to break the masculine sentence. In this section, I develop the historical idea of 'breaking' the masculine sentence and then link this notion to contemporary feminist scholars' claims, namely Rachel Blau DuPlessis's. After which, I argue that the focus on reacting, on resisting, on '*breaking*' the masculine sentence should be broken—in order to highlight that feminine writing is about more. It is also about *creating*.

Women have been oppressed.

True.

Women's writings have been marginalized.

True.

And language, historically, has been labeled as man-made.

True.

The feminist need to 'break' gendered dyads and to produce a female sentence can be found as early as Woolf's 1929 text. With emphasis on the notion that "[t]he sentence [in

⁸² Feminine and female are not equivalent terms.

nineteenth-century women texts] is a man's sentence," Woolf stresses feminine subordination as it is found in the field of writing and language (Woolf, *AROOO*, 76).⁸³ Because of this male-dominated sentence structure, Woolf insists upon the need for an androgynous mind, for "a plan of the soul so that in each of us two powers preside, one male, one female" (*AROOO*, 98). She feels that "a great mind is androgynous"—*neither female nor male*, but a sort of "natural fusion" between the two (*AROOO*, 98). Thus, a mind is both feminine and masculine.

However, this 'fusion' does not just happen; it must occur due to a 'break' in the sentence and sequence, a change in the norm. According to Woolf, all female authors must become like Woolf's fictional Mary Carmichael in order to write; first Carmichael "broke the sentence; now she has broken the sequence...*not for the sake of breaking, but for the sake of creating*" (*AROOO*, 81, my emphasis).

'Not for the sake of breaking.'

'But for the sake of creating.'

This act of creating is too often overpowered by the act of breaking.

The act of resisting. The act of reacting.

Critics claim that women's stories are *counterstories*, *outlaw* genres, reacting to masculine, mainstream structures and claiming that such writing acts resist inferior and marginal positions.⁸⁴ But such moves are dependent upon the very entity they are trying to break. I concur that the act of writing moves women into *less* objectified roles; she is generative, displaying that she is a 'subject.' However, such writing acts are dismissed when the focus of the writing overtly links women to inferior roles in comparison to their male counterparts,

⁸³ Woolf expands this notion, explaining that "there was no common sentence for her use" (76).

⁸⁴ Outlaw genre was briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, referencing Caren Kaplan. For a more complete examination of counterstories, refer to Hilde Lindemann Nelson and her text *Damaged Identities: Narrative Repair*.

positions that they have to *break*, positions that they have to *resist* and structures to which they have to *react*.

Such a notion of resisting, of reacting, of breaking is evident with many feminists today, who latch onto this idea of ‘breaking’ the structure in order to (re)define feminine writing in a male-dominated world. In fact, feminist scholar Rachel Blau DuPlessis has established her name within literary studies as a poet and critic as well as a dedicated Woolfian scholar with her own attempt to ‘break’ the structures. Originally published in 1985, DuPlessis writes an essay entitled “Breaking the Sentence; Breaking the Sequence”—which overtly links to Woolf, drawing directly upon her call to break away from the man’s sentence. However, DuPlessis’s attempt, like many attempts at highlighting the possibilities of feminine writing, falls short because of abstractions and emphases on resistance and thereby somewhat departs from Woolf’s idea of creating an ‘androgynous’ mind.

In efforts to open up spaces and methodologies for women writers to write their narratives, DuPlessis first explains the dominant notion of narrative. In her book titled *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers*, she writes, “Narrative in the most general terms is a version of, or a special expression of, ideology: representations by which we construct and accept values and institutions” (x).⁸⁵ Dominant, masculine narratives have closure, completeness, and DuPlessis outlines an alternative, an attempt to break the sentence ideally speaks on (and to) women as authors, claiming that *they* should not be constrained in the male-dominated narrative process of the “novel’s style, plot, and

⁸⁵ DuPlessis’s book is an examination of twentieth-century women writers and the “cultural conventions about male and female, romance and quest, hero and heroine, public and private, individual and collective” (ix). One of her chapters in this text appears as an article in *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction*; because my original research used this text, I will often cite it. (“Breaking the Sentence; Breaking the Sequence.” In *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction*. [Third Edition] Eds. Michael J. Hoffman and Patrick D. Murphy. [Durham: Duke University Press, 2005: 221-238].)

purpose” (“Breaking,” 221). DuPlessis insists that narratives do not have to follow the expected linear development; such unified structure is commonly associated to the male-dominated structure from which women should ‘break’ away. In fact, narratives, especially ones that are written with a feminine stylistics, encompass a more circular motif, in time, structure, or memory, stressing repetition and nonlinearity.

“To break the sentence,” DuPlessis states, “rejects not grammar especially, but rhythm, pace, flow, expression: the structuring of the female voice by the male voice, [the] female tone and manner by male expectations, [the] female writing by existing conventions of gender—in short, any way in which dominant structures shape muted one” (“Breaking,” 221). This is true. And I concur. To an extent. However, I contend that more emphasis should be placed on masculine and feminine—qualities that both genders possess. DuPlessis, like many, draws too much attention to the breaking away, the resisting of past labels, past structures.

Instead of existing within and embracing differences, ambiguities, multiplicities...

Instead of focusing on creating and writing anew.

DuPlessis’s attempt at breaking the structure emphasizes binary oppositions. Her male-female (rhetorical) dyad ironically restricts (and even ignores) the presence of the many other (and multiple) dominant ‘structures’ (plural) that should be taken into account when examining female authorial strategies and anxieties.⁸⁶ Furthermore, she writes women as one, as “a separate group,” as “outsiders” who undergo unified narrative implications that result in ‘one end’—forgetting to stress that difference does exist within this ‘other’ group, that a subculture may be present, but not all-defining (DuPlessis, “Breaking,” 230). This ‘separate group’—which

⁸⁶ DuPlessis does write that “dominant structures shape muted ones” (“Breaking,” 222). And her use of the plural form of structure is interesting because it is as if she (unconsciously) acknowledges the possibility of multiple structures that impress and implicate one’s internalization. But we (as readers) cannot completely know whether she is attributing these structures to merely the male-dominated domain (which I assume), or if her plural frame is actually acknowledging other possible dominance (such as a white-female dominance over an ethnic-female voice).

DuPlessis coins as “an actual Society of Outsiders” sacrifices difference in attempts to strengthen the *resistance* against the (one, male-centered) dominant group (“Breaking,” 230).

Instead of focusing on individual and authentic abilities—and even drive—to create.

DuPlessis’s intentions are to open up inclusive spaces for feminine writing and for individual stories to emerge; however, she becomes trapped in a game of language, holding the danger of reinstating the very structure that she is trying to break. And like many feminists, she places limitations on her own definitions and claims within feminine processes with her own (conscious or unconscious) rhetorical dualities between male and female—while overemphasizing a resistance to and the ‘breaking’ of a masculine structure.

Something that is commonly done.

I return to a quote cited in chapter two by Michelle Payne. Payne writes, “The feminist movement that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s is often identified as the point at which issues of sexual violence were significantly reinterpreted, analyzed not as ‘unnatural sexual acts,’ but as acts of violence supported and created by Western, patriarchal family structures. Women were encouraged to ‘*break the silence*’” (123, my emphasis). They were encouraged to resist their positioning. They were encouraged to react against what had been done.

To reiterate, critics *too often* focus on the fact that women *resist* their marginal positioning and *resist* masculine language and *react* to a historical placement of inferiority. This resistance and reaction are true. But they should not be the only entities highlighted. Such resistance and reaction, such breaking away from and reacting against masculine structure and language are not the full story of what is going on when women write their words, their wounds.

There is more.

Writing becomes both resisting *and creating*. I return to Woolf, who explains that a woman and her writing indeed ‘broke the sentence.’ But such writing was ‘*not for the sake of breaking, but for the sake of creating.*’

This ‘sake of creating’ should be stressed—and in emphasizing it, we, as scholars and feminists, will ‘break’ the existing monolithic understanding of a feminine language as mere resistance—in attempts to move the focus to the act of creating. And such a move is ideal when the topic of writing is trauma.

Linking the Act of Creating to Both Femininity and the Unconscious

Feminine writing is more than ‘writing the body.’ And this is evident when considering femininity and creativity. In fact, feminine writing has been and should be linked to the act of creating, and the links between these two extend beyond simply stating that *l’écriture féminine* focuses on both breaking *and creating*. Rather, I contend that these notions should highlight the connection between feminine qualities and creative processes, outlining a sort of feminine creativity, one that both prevents and creates the feminine, one that is always creating. In doing so, feminine writing—with its ‘feminine beauty’ and ‘many things’—becomes inherently linked with the not only the creative process but also the unconscious, and by connecting creativity and femininity, I ultimately assert that *l’écriture féminine* is a writing stylistic that is closer to the trauma, mediating between the conscious and unconscious. As discussed in chapter two and further illustrated by Fraser’s text in chapter three, traumatic memories exist outside of complete consciousness and resurface through sensations, flashbacks, images. Thus, a writing stylistic that flows and moves, avoiding fixity, better represents the impossibility of depicting a definitive account of the story of trauma. Such a stylistic is feminine and is inseparable from the creative process.

Before focusing on feminine writing specifically, I first stress that creative processes are indeed feminine, flowing and creating. As Carl Jung insists in his article titled “Psychology and Literature,” “The creative process has a *feminine* quality, and the creative work arises from *unconscious* depths—we might say, from *the realm of the mothers*” (430, my emphasis). I pause to note that in the previous chapter, I highlighted that Pandora represents a feminine quality of creation; however, this link is extended here to expand creativity and femininity to the realm of the unconscious. Linking the unconscious to not only ‘feminine quality’ but also ‘the realm of the mothers,’ Jung affirms the bond between femininity and acts of creation. Furthermore, predicating Jung’s affirmation is the well-known psychoanalytic perspective that the feminine is inherently linked to the unconscious.

Psychoanalysts have insisted that *women* are closer to the unconscious, the Lacanian realm of the Imaginary—more precisely, that women are located in “a space between the Symbolic and the Imaginary” (Robbins 171).⁸⁷ Furthermore, women are also associated with the unknown. I reiterate a quote by Worthington that was cited in chapter two: “Femininity, that which is not expressible or comprehensible in the terms of the symbolic order (understood as the patriarchal system of signification that organizes experience), is split off and repressed in the unconscious. Relegated to the realm of the repressed unconscious, the sign ‘woman’ remains unreadable” (108-109). Again, such positioning of the *female* has been attributed to breaking the male-dominated, phallogentric composition of language while simultaneously claiming that women are not as fixed, not as confined to meaning as men.⁸⁸ Such claims are meant to be creative, are meant to have possibilities. However, such claims are lost when bogged down on gender dyads—and not qualities. Thus, again, I reiterate that the term ‘female’ implies a

⁸⁷ The psychoanalytic Symbolic and Imaginary orders are explained more in depth later in this chapter.

⁸⁸ Robbins writes, “The binary relationship that appears to affirm the presence and meaning collapses, not into meaninglessness, but into a different and deferred set of possibilities” (171).

gendered distinction I am not willing to make. Rather, it is the *feminine* that is closer to the unconscious. It is the feminine that is open, that moves, that flows...

And the creative trait is a feminine trait.

Closely linked to “incubation and delivery” (Harris 45).⁸⁹

Negotiating between the unconscious and conscious realms, creativity exists in a liminal state, moving between and beyond. A sort of dance. As art therapist Penny Lewis explains, this “dance between the conscious and unconscious is choreographed in the magical place of the imaginal realm” (3).⁹⁰

A realm into which *l’écriture féminine* also taps.

A realm that mediates between the verbal and the nonverbal.

Existing between fact and fiction.

Holding an ability to be present, yet beyond reach.

Encompassing a ‘feminine beauty’ that is more than breaking dominant structure.

Encompassing a ‘feminine beauty’ that is more than reacting...

After all, as Jung writes, “the *creative* act...is the absolute antithesis of mere reaction” (422, my emphasis). It is proactive, engaging with and generating from energies and sensations that exist within the entire self—body, mind, and spirit.

Connecting Creativity and L’Ecriture Feminine with Trauma and the Unconscious

Thus, creative processes have the potential to encompass the entire self while mediating among language, images, and sensations—moving with and beyond wounds and words. Such an

⁸⁹ Harris is actually claiming that the womb and unconscious are “sites of incubation and delivery”—but because creativity is often associated with the womb and unconscious, I interchanged these terms. Furthermore, it is important to note that Harris draws a parallel between womb and disturbances and the unconscious and secrets as it relates to hysteria. Furthermore, creativity as a concept is thought to have an incubation stage, and the creative act has been associated with the act of birthing.

⁹⁰ In her book titled *Creative Transformation: The Healing Power of the Arts*, Lewis pits the imaginal realm against a relational realm, juxtaposing *eros* and *logos*, feminine and masculine, yin (receptive) and yang (active), creative and analytic. However, I should note that her text focuses more on the use of non-verbal art.

idea connects the unconscious to creativity, to this feminine quality. And as I explained in the previous chapter, when Fraser doodles her teddy bear, the unconscious plays a role in negotiating the non-narrative and narrative—depicting an image that at first lacks meaning, but an image to which Fraser soon assigns meaning. However, complete conscious meaning of her trauma is impossible.

In this section, I explain that complete conscious meaning is not possible by framing this idea in psychoanalysis. Specifically, I first explain the three psychoanalytic Lacanian orders of identity to emphasize that if complete conscious knowledge is not possible, then neither is complete understanding of the trauma. Furthermore, I briefly explain the properties of the unconscious in psychoanalytic studies by engaging with literary scholar Oliver Davis and his convergence of Lacanian and Jungian theories. I do so in order to insist that considering the concepts of two seemingly contradicting psychoanalytic theorists, Lacan and Jung, is beneficial when examining narratives of trauma. I do this namely to situate traumatic memories beyond, yet within language. In addition, I contend that taking these multiple viewpoints and theoretical claims into account better highlights possibilities within contradictions as well as connections between the feminine and creativity while emphasizing that a feminine form of expression, namely *l'écriture féminine*, is ideal for tapping into traumatic memories and mediating among conceptual distinctions of narrative and non-narrative.

To understand better the unconscious, I contextualize it within psychoanalytic discourse by exploring the three Lacanian orders: the Symbolic, Imaginary, and Real. Although the unconscious is commonly associated to the Real, an understanding of all better explains each.

In the most simplistic terms, the Symbolic and Imaginary orders can be explained respectively as “difference” and “similarity” (Leupin 13). To elaborate, the Symbolic is

understood as the law and is “a universal characteristic of humanity” (Leupin 12, 14). Such a trait links to language as “any existing language determines a symbolic order particular to a certain community” (Leupin 14). The Imaginary is a reflection of this, or as Leupin explains, “the set of similarities...the set of projections and identifications” (14). Thus, it is a “fictitious or illusory” depiction, but always lacking; this is what is known as individuals’ understanding of “reality” (16, 17). Furthermore, well-known gendered associations in psychoanalytic discourse can be condensed to one statement: “Whereas the Imaginary Order is centered in the mother, the Symbolic Order is ruled by what [Lacan] calls the ‘Law of the Father’” (Dobie 63).⁹¹ Ignoring the complications that arise because of gendered association, I mention this distinction to stress that individuals are not, and cannot be, whole. Something always remains lost, and identity lacks... Something always remains beyond consciousness... Furthermore, “[H]uman beings go through life longing for a return to the state of wholeness” (Dobie 63). But such ‘return to...wholeness’ is an impossible task.

Such connects to the last ‘order’—the Real. To elaborate, I explicate that the Real simply is and can be expressed with the ellipses (Leupin 13). More precisely, according to Leupin,

The *Real* is not an agency or order; it is a set whose contents are unknown. That is why it cannot be defined than by an affirmation of existence (‘There is...’) that cannot be qualified in any way; what there is, we don’t know, because it remains hidden from us in the unconscious. There are meaning and truth in the conscious...but they are out of the reach of our consciousness (17).

⁹¹ I acknowledge that expanding the connection to psychoanalysis more is possible, exploring gendered complications as well as links to *jouissance*, but this is a different project. Kristine Klement’s “Feminism Beyond Hysteria: Reading Feminine Ethics” would prove beneficial when doing so. (In *Psychoanalysis & La Femme: Special Issue*, January 2010. Web.) Furthermore, I acknowledge that links to Lacan’s analysis of Poe’s “Purloined Letter” may be made; however, doing so is out the scope of this project. In addition, doing so is not the framework that I select—as I wish to extend my claims beyond canonized works and create better connections with creative expressive fields. Thus, my claims also aim to negotiate between literary and expressive disciplines and scholarship.

This inability to connect language to the explanation of the Real sustains the idea that this ‘order’ represents the wholeness that cannot be accessed, expressed. In fact, Dobie affirms that “[The Real] is beyond language, the individual, or representation because in it there is no loss, lack, or absence” (63). Leupin expands, “It is only through...evocations, silences, dreams, that we may have an inkling of the Real. We know it exists, but we don’t know the content of this existence: ‘It is enough for us to posit that the unconscious *is*, no more and no less’” (17, engaging with Lacan). Thus, it is commonly understood that the Real is also the unconscious.

I must reiterate that trauma is not experienced like other ‘normal’ events. It is ‘extraordinary,’ and it is not stored in memory in a linear fashion—as explained in the previous chapters. Rather, connected to images, sensations, and the non-narrative, trauma is commonly conceived as not being completely accessible or expressible. Thus, I contend that knowing these properties of trauma as well as the effect it has on one’s identity—as explained in chapter two—situates the traumatic experience close/r to this unknown, unconscious realm. As Kalí Tal asserts, “Trauma is enacted in a liminal state” (15). And this ‘liminal’ state may be associated with the ‘liminal’ space—locked in the unconscious, yet surfacing again and again through conscious messages.

It is important to note the properties of the unconscious, and first and foremost, “[t]he unconscious is structured like a language” (Lacan qtd in Leupin 18). And “[i]f there is a linguistic structure in the unconscious, then there is knowledge in it,” albeit inaccessible knowledge as the unconscious is said to be impenetrable (Leupin 19). To clarify, “[t]he unconscious is to not remember what one knows” (Lacan qtd in Leupin 19). Such factors affect the understanding of the attempt to depict trauma, which is lost, incomplete, unknown. On one hand, the trauma cannot be remembered because it is ‘to not remember what one knows,’ and on

the other hand, the trauma is ‘structured like a language.’ This latter statement complicates matters because traumatic experiences have been identified as being connected to images and sensations, surfacing through flashbacks and dreams. For some psychoanalysts, this is not problematic simply because “a dream has the structure of a sentence” (Lacan 57). Thus, images, sensations, dreams—like the unconscious itself—‘[are] structured like a language.’

However, I insist that this is problematic when considering trauma narratives by women writers because as soon as the images, the sensations, the dreams are translated into linear sentences, these individuals lose a level of unknowns that cannot be known, situating traumatic experience in a static, finite form. And such an act distances them from the trauma by assigning definitive knowns to that which cannot be completely known. For some, this complication is skimmed over, dismissing everything as a fictional representation. Such is true. But I assert that this claim should be expanded in order to unpack better the intricacies of traumatic memories—and to link them with indefinites, multiplicities, and acts of fluidity. Furthermore, they should be linked to creating... to creative processes, feminine acts that move, that flow...

The Unconscious: Language, Images, Creative Flow

In order to link better language, images, creative flow, I turn to one literary scholar, Oliver Davis, who offers an explanation of how two seemingly divergent psychoanalysts may be converged. Explaining the unconscious by stressing connections between Lacan and Jung, Davis addresses these two theorists and their theories in his article “Theorizing Writerly Creativity: Jung with Lacan?”⁹² Articulating the distinct differences between these theorists while addressing some similarities, Davis creates a more comprehensive understanding of the

⁹² Davis creates a “convergence” between Jung’s “visionary artist” and “Lacan’s neurotic”—a convergence that is problematic (62-64). For me, I insist that considering both theorists should explicitly move the writer beyond the label of the neurotic. Furthermore, I recognize my stance may be met with criticism, as these two are commonly not linked and viewed as contradicting.

unconscious and its properties in psychoanalytic studies. Taking his lead, while acknowledging that a Lacanian and Jungian framework are distinctly different, I assert that the unconscious should be understood through *both* Lacanian and Jungian theories when engaging with trauma. My reasons for doing so is threefold: to keep these two distinct while identifying the possibilities of each; to better bridges disciplines, as creative expressive theorists and therapists often turn to Jung; and to better recognize that acknowledging both of these theorists and their respective theories bridges language and images with creative flow.

By considering both of these theorists' theories, the unconscious may be understood as consisting of multiple, and seemingly contradicting, traits. Thus, the unconscious holds a Lacanina structure of language, but it should be understood as more. Davis, engaging with Jung, explains that the unconscious has an "*anti-textual bearing*" and relies on what is referred to as "visionary art" (64, his emphasis). By "visionary art," Jung means the following:

[Visionary art are] works [that] positively force themselves upon the author; his hand is seized, his pen writes things that his mind contemplates with amazement. The work brings it its own form...while his conscious mind stands amazed and empty before this phenomenon, he is overwhelmed by a flood of thoughts and images which he never intended to create and which his own will could never have brought into being" (qtd in Davis 62).

Such works are closely linked to pandoric forms of expression which 'flood' through because of the creative process. But such works are hard to comprehend when thinking about the unconscious as explained by Lacan alone.

Davis expands, "Whereas the Lacanian unconscious is composed of potentially word-forming linguistic structures, the Jungian (collective) unconscious is made up of structures with a

potential for image formation” (66). This ‘image-formation’ is imperative. Although language is attributed to these images, they remain symbolic. And according to Davis, “Jung characterizes symbols as preverbal: ‘attempts to express something for which no verbal account yet exists’” (67). Jung elaborates, “A term or image is symbolic when it means more than it denotes or expresses” (qtd in Davis). However, this does not remove the linguistic structure of the unconscious—rather, it adds to it. In other words, when attempting to understand the unconscious, ironically that which is unknown, it is not a matter of whether the unconscious is defined by either Lacan or Jung. Rather, the unconscious may be thought of as both images and language. Such an idea is stressed by Davis and his convergence of two seemingly contradicting theorists: “Jung with Lacan, yes—literary study needs both or neither” (71).⁹³

Although I do not argue for a complete convergence of these two, I assert that recognizing both—despite their contradictions—opens up opportunities to negotiate and understand better the difficulties and possibilities when trauma and writing acts merge. Thus, both are needed in understanding the unconscious more than ever when trauma is at the core of narration—as stories move back and forth, between and beyond both images and language, existing within contradictions, revealing and concealing. I pause to note that Davis refers to the Jungian realm as “a language of interiority” where “inner experience is valued and real” (69). But I extend this ‘language of interiority’ to a language that cannot be completely known, that has to be closer to the unconscious, that is both feminine and creative, that is both creating and creating the feminine, especially when trauma is the topic. Thus, both Jung’s and Lacan’s theories add to and extend analyses, enabling a *feminine* style of writing to negotiate better these

⁹³ Further expanding Lacan and Jung and their respective theories are out of the scope of this project. Furthermore, researching Julia Kristeva and her theories would be beneficial when expanding these ideas in the future.

seemingly contradicting factors, allowing the linguistic, impenetrable Lacanian unconscious and the pictorial, symbolic Jungian unconscious to exist simultaneously.

The Unconscious: L'Écriture Feminine and the Poetic

When such convergences occur, language is closer to the trauma. In other words, I contend that *l'écriture féminine* style of writing is closer to traumatic memories, negotiating between the conscious and unconscious, tapping more into the Real than a masculine style of writing. Such a feminine language, such a poetics when situated within creativity and within the liminal aids in our understanding of how trauma can be re-created, re-constructed.

Into a sort of poetry.

Ambiguous.

Multiple.

Rhythmic.

Fluid.

A sort of 'visionary art.'

Into re-constructions of experiences that have not fully existed,

and cannot 'wholly' exist, but yet somehow do exist

with, through, and because of the feminine creative processes, creative acts.

And yet exists as pandoric, both whole and individual parts.

And like the unconscious itself, according to Jung, "[T]he creative act...will for ever elude the human understanding...it can be obscurely sensed, but never wholly grasped" (422).

Creativity is elusive. I extend this notion by emphasizing that *l'écriture féminine* is both creative and *poetic*. By poetic, I am not referring to the genre of poetry; rather, I refer to the ambiguity, the multiple meanings—the pandoric aspects—and the rhythmic flow involved when

writing (about) trauma. Thus, feminine language may also be said to be a poetic language, which is closer to the unconscious unknown because it lacks fixity, because it eludes finites, encompassing multiple meanings.

As Cixous writes, “What is *most true is poetic* because it is not stopped-stoppable” (*Rootprints*, 4, my emphasis). In other words, it cannot be contained. It cannot be ‘stopped’ and is not ‘stoppable.’ Rather, it flows; it moves...

Such a language does draw from visionary art.

Such a language is full of emotion.⁹⁴

Such a language moves...

Such a language embodies creation, creativity.

Such a language allows literary and feminist studies to stress the *act of creating*...

Creating with L’Ecriture Feminine

This feminine poetics encompasses a ‘feminine beauty’ as explained in the previous chapter, or rather, a pandoric quality. Furthermore, this poetics uses an intermodal approach of creation, engaging with different mediums and methods, drawing from knowns and unknowns, language and images—for ‘the sake of creating.’ In this section, I engage with Gloria Anzaldúa’s text *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* to argue that creating with *l’écriture feminine* moves the text beyond words and wounds, creating something new while stressing that transformation occurs in the *act* of creation. To do so, I first situate Anzaldúa as writing in a feminine style while building upon the notion of ‘feminine beauty.’ Next, I argue that the act of creation not only mediates between the conscious and unconscious but also creates a new consciousness, one that has the potential to transform.

⁹⁴ According to Lucia Capacchione in *Living with Feeling: The Art of Emotional Expression*, the very nature of the word ‘emotion’ means to move: “The Latin roots of the word *emotion* tell the whole tale: e (out) + mouvere (move)...It is the nature of emotions to move” (2).

Anzaldúa is aware that words and images are inherently linked. She writes, “An image is a bridge between evoked emotion and conscious knowledge; words are the cables that hold up the bridge. Images are more direct, more immediate than words, and closer to the unconscious. Picture language precedes thinking in words; the metaphorical mind precedes analytical thinking” (91). And it is this combination of ‘the [Jungian] metaphorical...and [Lacanian] analytical’ that drives her writing. It is this “visual art [that] cannot be separated from movement” (McNiff 104).

Her approach is closely linked to images, to sensations, to (creating with) the multiple. Blurring prose, myth, poems in two different languages, Anzaldúa’s form of expression exemplifies an intermodal approach, and she writes her ‘many things,’ her many selves, her many stories. In other words, she writes her trauma, using a feminine poetics and embracing her ‘feminine beauty.’

Feminine Poetics and Feminine Beauty

Although the two, feminine poetics and ‘feminine beauty,’ are closely connected, the two are not synonymous. I separate the two by identifying that feminine writing may be attributed to a narrative style while the ‘feminine beauty’ represents the pandoric qualities, the ambiguous nature and multiplicity. Often, the two do go hand in hand. However, not always. Before I continue with Anzaldúa, I turn back to Fraser to identify an example where the two do not always neatly intersect. In Fraser’s text, she embraces her ‘feminine beauty,’ but I assert that the end of her narrative offers too much of a closure for her text to be an ideal example of *l’écriture féminine*. Her text stops. In other words, rather than writing in a manner that completely embraces fluidity, stresses indefinites, and offers openness, Fraser closes her text with a neat and tidy textual closure, expressing that she has been relieved of her past, forgiving her father. She

writes, “So that is it. My other self is dead. My father is dead...I have been released from the monster that never was. Now I can close the coffin, truly close it” (242). Thus, she closes both the coffin and her story, telling both her father and the child goodbye.

Prior to this citation, Fraser writes,

I see the Xs and Os of a ticktacktoe game. I lift up the child to say goodbye to her daddy. With her fingers, she makes Xs and Os on the side of her daddy’s coffin—hugs and kisses, good-bye, good-bye. Hugging the child, I assure her she has done her best, that she’s a good child, a wise child, as all children are....I feel her melt into my chest.

Now I close my father’s coffin. I wave good-bye with a handkerchief (242, her emphasis).

This ending is somewhat problematic—as the text ends, and the traumatic representation disappears. Thus, there is no question that her narrative embraces a ‘feminine beauty,’ but such an ending is somewhat at odds with a feminine style of writing—as it is not open and implies a textual conclusion.

Indeed, one may even argue that this closure to her text contradicts the meaning of ‘feminine beauty’ because Fraser metaphorically boxes her trauma again, silencing herself and her story by writing that her other self ‘melt[s] into [her] chest.’ But I insist that this is not the case. Fraser continues,

The handkerchief turns into a white bird, which grows larger and larger till I feel myself becoming that bird. Now I am flying, my wings strong and sure as they beat the air—a seabird on its way to the ocean. In my mouth I have a quill to be dipped onto the sun, a quill to write with fire before plunging into the ocean (242, her emphasis).

These words may not come out and state that she will continue to share her story, ‘to write [it] with fire.’ But it is implied. She is ‘strong[er]’ and more self-aware, accepting her

multiplicities, her wounds and beauties, and viewing them as part of her entire ‘self’—not a detached character.

Furthermore, this textual story ends with the same ‘Xs and Os’ that begins her story. Thus, it circles back to the beginning—only this time, she is different. She has written her self anew. Therefore, in a (silent) way, her story continues... And Fraser indicates that this self at the end of this story is a transformed self.

What is important to note with Fraser’s text is that it represents ‘feminine beauty’ and depicts a ‘new’ self. And like Fraser, Anzaldúa, too, stresses that she has developed a ‘new’ self—and her newness is explicitly linked to the poetic ambiguities, multiple languages and genres, and a more overt openness of a feminine writing style.

And it is through her acceptance of these ambiguities and through her writing style that Anzaldúa is able to move beyond her wounds, beyond her words...

to transform.

Transforming with a Feminine Beauty and Poetics

Anzaldúa, like Fraser, similarly engages with a Pandoric figure. Only she does not view this figure as forbidden, nor does she ‘melt’ her into her self. Rather, she views this figure as an analogy to transform into something else. Thus, she and her story advocate for embracing and existing *within* binaries and ambiguities—as a means to heal and transform self and others. This figure, to which I am referring, is *Coatlicue*, an Aztec mythical feminine image, who bears many similarities to Pandora. Coatlicue is an image that “depicts the contradictory” and who “conceived all celestial beings out of her cavernous womb” (Anzaldúa 69, 68). She is associated with the image of the serpent and “symbolize[s] life and death together as parts of one process” (Anzaldúa 69).

She is ‘part’; she is ‘whole.’

She is beauty; she is evil.

She is ‘feminine beauty.’

Like Pandora.

And Anzaldúa recognizes that these chaotic, contradicting, and sometimes overwhelming ‘Coatlicue states’ are needed for transformation to occur. Here, I draw on Anzaldúa to link ‘feminine beauty’ with feminine poetics, arguing that these two aspects insist that transformation not only can happen but also is needed.

First, I emphasize that invoking the mythical figure, Anzaldúa stresses the entire self. Like Pandora, who encompasses “a dimension of the body that can never be seen,” or rather a “dual nature [that is] indicative of what [people] recognize to be the structure of the body and soul,” Coatlicue is associated to more than just the body (Lev Kenaan 89). Anzaldúa connects this figure to the soul, explaining the following: “The soul uses everything to further its own making. Those activities or *Coatlicue* states which disrupt smooth flow (complacency) of life are exactly what propel the soul to do its work: make soul, increase consciousness of itself” (Anzaldúa 68). But while stressing ‘the soul,’ Anzaldúa highlights the importance of ‘increas[ing] consciousness of itself,’ of becoming more self-aware.

Thus, a new consciousness does not have to be relegated to knowns. Rather, it is a consciousness that moves between and beyond two, sometimes more, entities—which includes body and soul, or rather, as I have been stating, mind, body, and (creative) spirit.

It is a consciousness that moves between and beyond images and sensations.

Gloria Anzaldúa refers to this new consciousness as a *mestiza* consciousness, a ‘third element’ that does not rest of binaries, but rather, works within ambiguous states, negotiating

binaries and creating hybrid position(ing)s. She explains, “The third element is a new consciousness—a *mestiza* consciousness—and though it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from *continual creative motion* that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm” (102, my emphasis).⁹⁵ Her words emphasize working with her ‘many things’ to lead to transformation, a transformation that is beyond...

I purposely leave the above sentence unfinished because of connections to feminine creation, feminine writing, and the mediation between the knowns and unknowns. In addition to the fact that Anzaldúa is attuned to the need for a transformed, new self to emerge, I also assert that she recognizes this transformation to emerge through the act of creation—more specifically, through the act of writing, which is in line with ‘feminine beauty.’

Anzaldúa explains, “When I *write* it feels like I’m carving bone. It feels like I’m carving my own face, my own heart...My soul makes itself through *the creative act*. It is constantly remaking and giving birth to itself through my body” (95, my emphasis). Equating ‘the creative act’ with writing and linking body and soul, Anzaldúa overtly taps into the feminine qualities of birthing, of creating a new self.

Through the act of writing, Anzaldúa literally and metaphorically moves through and beyond her trauma:

When I create stories in my head, that is allow the voices and scenes to be projected in the in the inner screen of my mind, I ‘trance.’ I used to think I was going crazy or that I was having hallucinations. But I realize it is my job, my calling, to traffic in images...When I don’t write the images down for several days or weeks or months, I get physically ill. Because writing invokes images from my unconscious, and because some

⁹⁵ Anzaldúa notes the pain and the idea that knowing itself is painful: “‘Knowing’ is painful because after ‘it’ happens I can’t stay in the same place and be comfortable” (70).

of the images are residues of trauma which I then have to reconstruct. I sometimes get sick when I *do* write (92).⁹⁶

Writing these pandoric images, these ‘Coatlicue states’ is not always easy, but doing so opens up possibilities and spaces for transformation to occur.

Anzaldúa continues, “[I]n reconstructing the traumas behind the images, I make ‘sense’ of them, and once they have ‘meaning’ they are changed, transformed. It is then that writing heals me...” (92). Without engaging with the complexities of the finiteness of the statement that ‘writing heals [her],’ I draw attention to this quote to stress the links between writing as a creative act that mediates between images and language to make meaning, to yield transformation, to engage with creative processes that link to healing processes.

The *act* of writing becomes Anzaldúa’s method of transformation. In fact, Anzaldúa further explains that writing for her is “an *endless* cycle of making it worse, making it better, but always making meaning out of the experience, whatever it may be” (95, my emphasis). Always making meaning that creates something new. As Anzaldúa states, “[i]t is always a path/state to something else” (95).

And this ‘something else’ is in essence a ‘feminine beauty’—depicted in a ‘feminine poetics.’ This something else, like Pandora herself, “leads her beholders to revise their past vision” (Lev Kenaan 46). Thus, Anzaldúa, led by her acceptance of the pandoric, results in a new self, a new consciousness. One that is in ‘an endless cycle of making it worse, making it better, but always making meaning.’ I stress this to assert that Anzaldúa’s process is without closure, never finished, always open. She is constantly making herself anew, transforming her body, mind, and spirit with and through her act of creative expression.

⁹⁶ This relates back to James Pennebaker, who explains the exhaustion that may occur when writing painful, traumatic topics.

Feminine Creation and Flow

I stress Anzaldúa's creative act because it is connected to not only the feminine writing style, and the flow and movement of this poetics, but also to the *creative flow*. The flow that is beyond the creative product. Indeed, the writing is fluid, and it flows. But there is more. My choice to use the term flow is conscious as it links the 'flow' of the feminine language with the 'flow' that is associated with creativity.

Creative theorist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi develops the concept of "flow" (1990) which is "a sense of timelessness while creating" (Piirto 18). This idea depicts a "trancelike state" that "occurs 'when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile'" (Piirto 45). Thus, when Anzaldúa states that she 'trance[s]' with the images, with her writing, she is also stressing that her creative act is both 'difficult *and* worthwhile'—depicting what has been referred to as creative *flow*.

Prior to the term flow, Brewster Ghiselin (1952) explains this "trancelike state" of the creative process as "surrend[ing] 'oceanic consciousness'" (Piirto 45, 44). Such an earlier depiction better links the creative flow with the feminine 'oceanic' style of writing. In addition, words like "restlessness" and "movement" are also associated with this state (Piirto 44). These terms indicate the poetic inability to be contain, or its inability to be 'stopped-stoppable' as Cixous states. And Anzaldúa exemplifies...

Anzaldúa's textual stylistic represents constant action, constant motion, disrupting linearity, flowing between prose and poetry and moving between English and Spanish. In other words, Anzaldúa's writing represents her 'many things' while simultaneously embracing

‘movement, vocal expression, and performance’ because of her creative, feminine textual stylistics.⁹⁷

In 1988, George Plimpton labels this state of flow as a “dreamlike state”: “When the writing is really working, I think there is something like dreaming going on” (qtd in Piirto 44). Thus, when in this state of flow, writing acts as a sort of vehicle between the conscious and unconscious, blurring the distinctions and allowing access to the inaccessible.

Time is lost. Place is of little, if any, concern.

One becomes intimately connected with her creative process/es,

her intermodal approaches, her ‘feminine beauty.’

These moments of flow can be opened by writing, by using a poetic language, one that is directly linked to the feminine, one that is better known as *l’écriture féminine*.

A structure that establishes order within its ambiguities, its multiplicity, its openness.

A structure that is defined by its lack.

A structure that is beyond the text.

A structure that disrupts expectations, that ruptures linearity.

A structure that is repetitive and circular.

A structure that resists, but more so...

A structure that creates anew...

A structure that is creating...

A structure that is...

⁹⁷ McNiff stresses “how movement, vocal expression, and performance can allow us to more completely access the creative energies manifested by images” (155).

And through this feminine creativity, the inexpressible becomes expressible while eluding expression. Such a statement makes sense when ambiguities are accepted and openness is embraced—stressing the constant flow involved.

I contend that transformation, that healing is at its peak during these moments of flow. After all, Shaun McNiff affirms that the continual process and the actual movement of creation and re-invention yield therapeutic benefits. He explains, “Curing the soul is...based on *sustaining* creative expression and movement” (198, my emphasis). McNiff elaborates, “[H]ealing comes from action” (190).

And Anzaldúa’s chosen creative action is writing.

She had a need ‘to create’
and a desire to hold onto hope.⁹⁸

In the next chapter, I will expand upon this ‘movement,’ this ‘creative expression.’ Specifically, I will expand upon the drive ‘to create’ post-trauma, in attempts to move beyond product and process and intertwine *purpose*. Doing so will engage with the story as a means of healing the self.

⁹⁸ In the myth of Pandora, hope remains. Panofsky and Panofsky engage with one particular version, citing the translation as the following: “...And, lifting the lid, [man] set [all the goods] free to return the houses of the gods and to fly thither, thus fleeing from the earth. Hope alone remained” (translation of Babrius qtd 8). This same portion of the myth appears at the beginning of Fraser’s fiction, directly preceding chapter one, *Pandora*: “Forthwith there escaped a multitude of plagues for hapless man...Pandora hastened to replace the lid, but alas! the whole contents of the jar had escaped, one thing only excepted, which lay at the bottom, and that was *hope*” (my emphasis). I highlight that hope remains, no matter the ills.

5 'LET ME TELL YOU A STORY': THE STORY AS HEALING

The man raped me. It's the truth. It's a fact.

I was five, and he was eight months married to my mother.
- Allison (Two, 39)⁹⁹

These are Dorothy Allison's shocking words, words that are a part of one of her many stories about her childhood trauma of incest and how she survived. The story in which these words appear is titled *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure*, but this is not her only story. Allison, an American author who experienced a trauma, chose to write and re-write her story. Again and again. Each time unique. Each time reflective of her 'self.' Like Fraser, she writes her story multiple times, in different forms. Other works include a fictional account of trauma titled *Bastard out of Carolina* and a collection of essays titled *Skin: Talking about Sex, Class, and Literature*, which references her trauma. Thus, her works bear her trauma, in some way, in some form. Some more than others. Some more overtly fictional than others. However, I highlight the multiple versions of her story of trauma to contend that Allison saw the story as a form of healing and felt a need to write and re-write it.

Her story is personal.

Her story is unique.

Her story is her 'self.'

In the previous chapter, I argued that a feminine poetics of writing links writing acts with the traumatic memories, enabling the author to engage better with states of flow as well as a writing process that flows. However, what is implied in that chapter and the previous one is that there is a *drive* to write. Like Fraser and Anzaldúa, Allison *needed* to write her story. This drive

⁹⁹ Allison's *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure* shall be referred to as *Two*. Furthermore, this phrase will be repeated, without citing again and in italics, throughout this chapter to disrupt readers' expectations.

extends the process of writing to the *purpose* of writing and will be explored in depth in this chapter through the context of the story.

Using Allison's text as an impetus for my claims, I engage further with the story as a form of *healing* post-trauma. In this chapter, I assert that the story is indeed needed for the purpose of the self to move towards healing. This notion of healing, of transformation, of creating the self anew has been a thread in previous chapters, but it now becomes the focus. Here, I situate the creation of the story as a drive, examining the intricacies involved, and I ultimately position myself as a literary scholar and feminist who claims that one cannot return to a coherent self, that the repetitive act of narrating a story is more than a compulsive tendency, and that she who has experienced a trauma can never be completely *healed*. In order to do so, I situate the story as a stage in healing, referring to Herman to link the act of narrating a story to therapeutic recovery, while making other overt links to therapy. Thus, I challenge definitive arguments, viewing them as oversimplified and too ideal when the topic is trauma. Drawing on Allison, DeSalvo, Nin, and hooks, this chapter argues against such finite conclusions and insists that women who have experienced traumas not only *need* to story but also *need* to re-establish a self post-trauma. Furthermore, they will always need to engage with creative acts that connect her to *healing*—acts that are spiral, acts that occur with and through creation and re-creation, acts that repeat again and again, acts that never end...

By stressing the movement of creativity, the movement of writing with a feminine poetics, I not only align creating processes with healing processes but also writing with re-writing the once 'wounded' self, redefining her purpose, refusing to relegate her to one who is frozen in and by her trauma. Rather, she is an active and creative individual, a *healer*, who is driven to write, to create, to move towards healing.

But before I can engage with these topics, I must first expand on the idea that “[t]he story becomes the thing needed” (Allison 3). So...

*Let me tell you a story*¹⁰⁰

Women have been oppressed.

Women’s writings have been marginalized.

This is the story that I have told throughout my dissertation. Over and over. Both implicitly and explicitly. In different ways.

Let me tell you a story...

One where women ‘speak out.’

One where women ‘scream.’

One where women ‘cry.’¹⁰¹

One where women are part of both a larger story and an individual story.

One where a woman chooses to write her self.

As she chooses. For her purpose(s).

At that specific moment. No matter that her story appears to be ‘too much.’

This is the story of a Pandora, a point that I stress in chapter three. This is a story about a trauma that may appear to be forbidden, but in actuality, it holds onto hope while engaging with

¹⁰⁰ Although Allison’s phrase is used repeatedly in her text, I only cite its first use (1). Furthermore, I will also repeat this phrase by Allison without citing it again, setting it off with spaces to disrupt traditional stylistics. Please note that one of her ‘let me tell you a story’ phrases closes the preface of this dissertation, but I chose to delay citing her until now to blur better her story with my own.

¹⁰¹ This is a direct reference to Lev Kenaan: “[Pandora] speaks out, she screams, she cries” (151).

its contradictions. For it is a story of a personal account that eludes understanding, that attracts and repeals.

Let me tell you a story...

Women who experience a trauma and decide to write their story are engaging with their drives, their symptoms sparked by the trauma.

In attempts to return to a sense of wholeness.

In attempts to make sense of the nonsensical.

In attempts 'to heal' post-trauma.

The Drive to Story the Trauma

The drive to story the trauma cannot be reduced to one motive. However, authors commonly point out that they had a need to create, a drive to write their story, and a desire to share it. Furthermore, this drive, this need to engage with the story of the trauma is commonly attributed to two purposes: reenacting the trauma due to the psychoanalytic idea of a “compulsion to repeat” the trauma and attempting to re-create a coherent self. Although I have touched upon these two ideas, albeit briefly, in the previous chapters, I reiterate them in this section in order to reveal better their shortcomings before expanding my arguments to stress the therapeutic practices of narrating. After doing so, I examine the relationship among self, story, and recovery in order to stress that repetition of the story is more—it is linked to healing post-trauma—acts that link to and build upon writing with, in, and through *l'écriture féminine* and creating a new consciousness, a *mestiza consciousness*.

The Story as Compulsions to Repeat and to Create a Coherent Self

As mentioned in chapter two, an individual who experienced a trauma is drawn to, yet repulsed by the trauma, wanting to understand, yet trying to forget. Drawing from psychoanalysis, I explain that there may be a compulsion to repeat and that there is a drive for wholeness. I do so in order to point out that despite these drives, there is something more, something else, and this is the drive to story for healing.

I reiterate that the individual, caught in cyclic patterns, and her compulsive, repetitive narration of her story hold the potential to harm the self further. However, these reenactments also work towards attempting to create a coherent self—a task that psychoanalytic studies points out is impossible. This is because no individual is coherent; the self is split and constantly tries to fix this.

To elaborate and reiterate, the self spends its life attempting to return to wholeness. As Ann R. Dobie exclaims, “[H]uman beings go through life longing for a return to the state of wholeness when we were one with our mother, manifested in our desire for pleasure and things. But wholeness will always elude us” (63). Although this concept is in regards to the first traumatic experience—the separation from the mother—it has relevance when the topic is trauma.

Drawing from this, I focus on the idea that a return to an earlier self is not possible—even a self prior to the traumatic experience. Yes, this self because of the traumatic experience is more ruptured, more fragmented, more split than an individual who has not experienced a trauma. However, it is important to note that no matter how many times the story of trauma is told, the self *cannot* return to a coherent self. Despite literary scholars attempt to stress that life-writing is a way to piece together a fragmented life. Sonia Apgar is one such critic, claiming that

life-writing *does* result in a “coherent self” (15). But I note the impossibility of a ‘coherent self.’ And I stress that she, who has experienced a trauma, cannot return to the self that existed pre-trauma. Furthermore, I stress that trauma cannot be remembered completely. Thus, no matter how many times, the story is written, it will never be an exact representation of the trauma.

The man raped me. It’s the truth. It’s a fact.

I was five, and he was eight months married to my mother.

Her wounds.

Her words.

Honest. And quick.

The ‘need’ to share her account, her story was urgent. Allison writes, “The *need* to tell my story was terrible and persistent, and I *needed* to say it bluntly and cruelly, to use all these words, those old awful tearing words [like rape and child]” (*Two*, 42, my emphasis). And I agree. She ‘needed’ to release her pain, her story, her truth.

Not as *just* a form of compulsive repetition.

Not as *just* an attempt to create an illusory depiction of a coherent self.

But rather, for something more.

For something that is...

Thus, she needed to release her pain, her story, her truth...

for her *self*, her mind, body, and creative spirit.

She needed to release her pain, her story, her story for her recovery,

a recovery process that has no end,

a recovery process that is dependent upon a spiral movement of healing.

The Story as Recovery

Before expanding upon this constant and spiral movement of healing, I must first explain that the story itself *is* used for healing post-trauma. In fact, Judith Herman points out, “In the second stage of recovery, the survivor tells the story of the trauma. She tells it completely, in depth and in detail” (175).¹⁰² And that’s what Allison does, again and again, in her texts. She may not tell it ‘in depth and in detail’ every time. But there are fragments, and her past pains resonate. And only Allison—if anyone at all—knows how beneficial these stories are to her personal well-being. However, it is safe to speculate that each telling, no matter the medium, is beneficial in varying degrees and that each returns to the wounds while also inviting others into the story. Thus, there is an interaction between self and trauma and between self and others through the act of creating, of writing, of sharing her story. And here I focus on the relationship among self, story, and recovery as a means to foster healing post-trauma.¹⁰³

As Herman explains, the story is a stage of recovering the self, and the individual is forced to remember/re-member the pain and tasked with moving beyond it. Such a stage seems simple enough. However, as noted throughout my dissertation, recovering and writing the story are not easy tasks. But such acts may assist in recovery—a word layered in its meaning. As previously noted, traumatic experiences affect memory. Thus, expressing the story may aid in actually recovering, or remembering, fragments of the trauma while playing a role in one’s recovery, or healing, processes post-trauma.

Stories arise not only in efforts to remember the past but also in hopes of creating meaning and reestablishing a sense of order—when the traumatic experience altered this order.

¹⁰² The first stage is safety, and the third and last stage is reestablishing and sustaining relationships. Herman elaborates on the goals of each stage: which she explains as follows: “The central task of the first stage is the establishment of safety. The central task of the second stage is remembrance and mourning. The central task of the third stage is reconnection with ordinary life” (155).

¹⁰³ In the following chapter, I focus on the connection between self and others.

Thus, it is no wonder why a literary scholar like Judith Harris claims that stories of trauma organizes the chaos. According to Harris, “Stories [about trauma] exist to make order out of chaos, to structure and organize experiences into something separate from the events that first induced painful and chaotic emotions” (7).

Such stories are written attempts to move past the ‘painful and chaotic emotions’ caused by trauma. And such stories are said to assist in recovery processes because “[w]riting... organizes the trauma” (Pennebaker, *Opening*, 185).¹⁰⁴ And I would extend this ordering, this organization of the trauma to an order that remains open, that may find order in disorder, and that embraces both a feminine poetics and ‘feminine beauty’ when needed. Only with and through these multiplicities, these intersections will stories of trauma yield healing. As Harris notes, “Stories begin with the telling; and in times of personal affliction or suffering, or justifiable anger, ‘getting a story out’ can be *restorative* and *self-therapeutic*” (8, my emphasis).

Thus, the act of narrating the story, the self, and the trauma is linked to recovery.

Writing the Self and Trauma as Healing

This need, this drive to story the self and the trauma may be manifested as a need to write. As Jane Piirto explains, “The urge and psychological need to write...[is] a more personal need, the need to find out what one is thinking, the need to put it down so that it can be dealt with, the need to codify emotion” (202). By focusing on this ‘personal need’ to write, I explore claims that highlight relationships between writing as healing in order to challenge the definitive outcomes. In doing so, I unfold some of the problems and potentials that are associated when writing the self and trauma. Thus, I explore some of the limitations and possibilities in this section by engaging primarily with literary scholars and authors such as Louise DeSalvo and Anaïs Nin. I do so in order to offer a reconceptualized vision that better situates the act of

¹⁰⁴ Assume Pennebaker’s *Opening Up: The Healing Power of Expressing Emotions* unless noted otherwise.

narrating the story of the self and trauma as a creative act that moves, or rather, that works towards healing through continuous creative movement. But first, I must expand upon writing the self and trauma by engaging with Pennebaker before turning to an example of how literary scholars complicate these intersections.

A little over a decade ago, James W. Pennebaker, who is known for his case studies, expanded the links between writing and healing, scientifically proving that writing *does* better the ‘self.’ He reveals physical benefits when writing about past wounds.¹⁰⁵ These case studies coupled with his own personal experiences enable Pennebaker to determine that writing after a traumatic experience aids in healing.

Specifically, writing aids in creating a healthier lifestyle. Pennebaker sums up his reasoning with the following four points: “*Writing clears the mind...Writing resolves traumas that stand in the way of important tasks...Writing helps in acquiring and remembering new information...Writing fosters problem solving*” (*Opening*, 190-191, his emphasis). Thus, it is, indeed, evident that connections between acts of writing and self-motivation and self-development have been made.

However, I mention Pennebaker and his claims about writing and healing to stress two facts. First, I stress the fact that writing is not a “panacea” (Pennebaker 42, 83, 197). Second, I stress the fact that such statements imply that no other outcome is possible—whereas that is not the case. Thus, I question the fixity of such claims. Can trauma be completely resolved? And does writing always yield problem solving? I ask these questions to merely highlight the

¹⁰⁵ Pennebaker’s research demonstrates that writing may at first be painful, but with time, the benefits transcend mental and cross into the physical: “People who wrote about their deepest thoughts and feelings surrounding traumatic experiences evidenced heightened immune function compared with those who wrote about superficial topics” (*Opening*, 37).

implications of such fixed statements before turning to authors and some of their claims about the connections among writing the self, writing the trauma, and writing as an attempt ‘to heal.’

One such individual is Louise DeSalvo, Italian-American author and literary scholar. In fact, DeSalvo argues that these three are inherently linked, establishing the metaphor of “writing as a ‘fixer’” (6-7). This metaphor plays with the dual nature of ‘fixing’: the textual ‘fixing’ of the words into a static, black-and-white, fixed story as well as the idea that writing ‘fixes’ the self post-trauma (6-7). Furthermore, DeSalvo insists, “*Writing has helped me heal. Writing has changed my life. Writing has saved my life*” (3, her emphasis).

Suffering from her own traumatic, personal experiences, DeSalvo clings onto her drive to write. Like Allison, DeSalvo has ‘a *need* to write’: “But I had a *need* to write” (30, her emphasis). This drive to write was powerful. Persistent. But ironically, hidden, yet discovered through her writing acts. To explain better, DeSalvo admits in a journal that she “was feeling so hopeless, so helpless, that [she] wanted to run [her] wrists over broken glass” (167). However, she further explains that she accidentally misspelled the word ‘wrists’—and wrote ‘writs.’ What she calls, an unconscious connection to her *written* words, her drive to write. She continues to explain that this slip in the spelling was a link to her inner self that revealed that she did not have to harm herself, but rather her writing acts would heal her. In other words, she wanted ‘to write’ or to “run [her] *writs*—[her] *writings*—over broken glass” (167).

Whether or not I fully accept DeSalvo’s unconscious slip as offering writing as an alternative to slicing her wrists is not important. What is significant is the fact that DeSalvo *did*. And equally important is the idea that DeSalvo had a need to share this story, writing how writing literally saved her life. Thus, she (re)created her self-image with and through the act of writing. She felt as if writing ‘fixed’ her. She found her healing through her writing acts.

And I agree. To an extent. Again, I question the ability to fix, to control, and to make sense completely. Thus, I stress my questions of the ability to ‘heal’ completely and to create a ‘coherent self.’¹⁰⁶

Can one be *healed* and become *whole* through writing?

DeSalvo is not the sole author to make this claim. In fact, several authors acknowledge the links between writing and healing, addressing their experiences and how writing has been beneficial.¹⁰⁷ For example, Plath writes that “fury jams the gullet and spreads poison, but, as soon as I start to write, dissipates, flows out into the figure of the letters: *writing as therapy?*” (qtd in Berman 131, my emphasis). Thus, it is obvious that she felt a link. But Plath ended her own life—an overt act that shows that she was never completely ‘*healed*’ from her pains.¹⁰⁸ So does this mean that writing failed? That she remained/remains ‘wounded’? I ask these questions to expand upon the complications that arise when claiming that the *purpose* of authors engaging in writing acts is *to heal*, and by exploring the limitations, I will better open up spaces for possibilities to emerge.

Problems of Writing the Self

In addition to essentialized claims that focus on being *healed* and attempting to become *whole*, I contend that women writing for the purpose of healing is discredited simply because of

¹⁰⁶ For me, healing is a process, and this ‘process’ is evident with people’s preoccupation with the topic of trauma. I list some authors/scholars who once experienced a trauma and who continue to ‘study’ the topic, advocating healing benefits of writing: DeSalvo studies Woolf; Pennebaker researches trauma and individuals; MacCurdy advocates for ‘writing and healing’ within the classroom; and Nin obsesses over psychoanalysis. And myself.

¹⁰⁷ Men and women authors both note these benefits. For example, Henry Miller acknowledges that “[for him] writing was like ‘sewing up a wound’” (DeSalvo 45). Thus, I reiterate that my gendered containment is for my project alone—as healing, writing crosses gender boundaries. I should acknowledge that others are opposed to giving too much credit to the therapeutics of writing, and how such writing can affect others. One such scholar is Stanley Fish. In his *New York Times* blog, Fish makes his sentiments known, dismissing the idea that “I write so that you feel better or I write so that the world will become a better place.” He continues, “If you found something that you really like to do [like writing]...then do it at the highest level of performance you are capable of, and leave the world and its problems to others” (*New York Times*, Feb. 11, 2007). But this view ignores interconnectedness, which is explored in chapter six.

¹⁰⁸ Jeffrey Berman engages with this idea in *Diaries to an English Professor: Pain and Growth in the Classroom*. Furthermore, he explains that writers who are not ‘healed’ still experience the benefits of writing.

the topics at hand—the unknown trauma and *the self*. The act of writing about the self can be viewed as being too selfish, too narcissistic. As Judith Harris acknowledges, “Personal writing [is] often dismissed as too *self*-referential” (11, my emphasis).

‘Self-referential.’

Self-serving.

Self-indulgent.

This section elaborates on the problems of writing the self by highlighting that the act of writing may be, may become, or may be interpreted as only an act of neurosis—ignoring its healing potentials. To do so, I first stressed that too much focus on only self may be viewed negatively; this point is reiterated throughout the section. However, before engaging with how the focus of the self may indeed be a limitation, I highlight that the self *is* supposed to be a focus in life-writing by engaging with claims that are primarily associated with the genre of the journal. After doing so, I turn to Anaïs Nin and her journals to stress how writing and re-writing different versions of one’s story opens up the space for literary scholars to argue that life-writing is not valid because of its performance. Thus, this section ultimately argues that acts of writing the self may inadvertently work against healing efforts, resulting in disbelief and/or keeping unhealthy stories alive.

Such negative opinions may seem at odds when considering writing the self—especially when considering the genre of journal writing. In fact, as Tian Dayton claims, “Journaling can be an effective way for trauma survivors to piece together fragments of memory and put them into sequence” (223). Such a claim is reiterated by two pioneers in the self-help field, Ellen Bass and Laura Davis, authors of *The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse*. They write, “A journal can help you figure out how you feel, what you think, what you

need, what you want to say, how you want to handle a situation, just by writing it through”

(27).¹⁰⁹ Stressing the benefits of writing in a journal, Bass and Davis explain, “One handy thing about writing is that it’s almost always available. At three in the morning, when you’re alone or you don’t want to wake your partner, when your friend’s out of town, when your counselor’s answering machine is on...your journal is there. It’s quiet, cheap, and portable” (27). Thus, there is no denying that writing and healing the self *have* been linked.

Such has been viewed as beneficial.

However, the focus on *the self* is also a limitation.

In fact, journal scholar and author Christina Baldwin unknowingly points out this limitation of the journal when she is highlighting its benefits. In her text *Storycatcher: Making Sense of Our Lives through the Power and Practice of Story*, Baldwin writes, “[Journal writing] is a story told to the *self*, by the *self*, for the benefit of the *self*” (40, my emphasis). But self-expression can easily imply self-obsession.

One just needs to think of Anaïs Nin, a well-known author who writes over 15,000 pages in journals (Bobbitt 269; Kuntz 537).¹¹⁰ With volumes and volumes of both diaries and unexpurgated versions, Nin’s need to write is obvious.

Like Allison, Nin has a *drive* to write.

However, Nin’s ‘need’ to write seems excessive, adding to critics’ skeptic attitude towards Nin and her journal writings.¹¹¹ In other words, the validity of her diaries is questioned

¹⁰⁹ I acknowledge the difference between a journal and a published narrative, and distinctions have been made and will continue to be made through this chapter.

¹¹⁰ Nin’s diaries exist in about 150 volumes; she publishes four unexpurgated versions, *Henry and June*, *Fire*, *Incest*, and *Nearer the Moon* (Kuntz 537, footnote 3). And Nin also omits and/or changes information (Bobbitt 272).

¹¹¹ Critics have been known to refer to her diaries as overt lies. In her article titled “Truth and Artistry in the Diary of Anaïs Nin,” Joan Bobbitt engages with the authenticity referring to the diary as “a calculated artistry” and stressing that “it is fiction” (267, 270). (In *Journal of Modern Literature*. May 1982, 9[2]: 267-276). Such a connection to art is mentioned in Paul Grimley Kuntz’s article “Art as Public Dream: The Practice and Theory of Anaïs Nin.” (In *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. Vol. 32, No 4 [Summer 1974]: 525-537.)

by literary scholars. Nin recognizes others' apprehensions with her finished products, confessing the following: "There has been an attempt to categorize my work as a mere depiction of neurosis" (*On Writing*, 17). Which it is. I acknowledge this. In fact, Nin herself even refers to her journal(s) as a sort of addiction: "I never have seen as clearly as tonight that my journal writing is a vice, a disease...The journal, like a fragment of myself, shares my duplicities...Occasionally I stop writing and feel a profound lethargy" (*Henry and June*, 144).¹¹² These words stress Nin's need to write while pointing out not only that this need is recurring and addictive but also that this need results in exhaustion.

Furthermore, such addictions run the risk of fostering unhealthy stories, re-opening the wound and focusing on the wound itself. Such writing acts keep the traumatic experience and negative emotions alive. In their co-edited collection titled *Narrative Therapy: Making Meaning, Making Lives*, narrative therapists Catrina Brown and Tod Augusta-Scott refer to these stories as "unhelpful or oppressive stories about our lives...and with them often the misery, unhappiness, and injustice" (xix-xx). Thus, when the focus is on the 'wound,' narrating the story of the self may be counterproductive.¹¹³ Such writing acts become the antithesis of healing.

However, I contend that such limitations, such interpretations are not the only perspective, and writing to heal past traumatic experiences should be more than a static re-presentation of neurosis, a monolithic product of repetition compulsion. Rather, it should engulf the very purpose, moving with and through creative and healing processes to stress that writing the self post-trauma is more than a product alone.

¹¹² In *Diary of Anaïs Nin, Volume One*, Nin declares, "I am aware of being in a beautiful prison, from which I can only escape by writing" (7). Thus, writing was her 'vice' and her 'escape.'

¹¹³ A similar concern of re-creating the pain was mentioned in chapter two (engaging with Gilmore and Herman) and is also revealed in Lynn Worsham's article "Composing (Identity) in a Posttraumatic Age" when she points out the potential to "fetishize narrative" (180).

Potentials of Writing the Self

For Nin, writing is an attempt “to reconcile [her] to [her] own image” (*Diary*, 110).¹¹⁴ Nin is aware that she writes and re-writes her many selves, selves that she acknowledges to be fragmented, incomplete, re-presentations (*Diary*, 47). Her awareness of her own split in her self may be, in part, due to her studying psychoanalysis. However, her writing and continual return to writing imply that she found the act to be more than a neurotic behavior. In fact, I argue that she found the act of writing, the creativity of expressing to be cathartic and that her writing acts assisted in redefining her interpretation of her self.

In this section, I engage with literary scholars Baldwin, Harris, and Henke to move beyond the limitations, focusing on the potentials of writing the self. Here, I highlight that writing the story, writing the self serves two positive purposes. First, it serves as an affirmation that a woman who writes her story of trauma *has survived* to write it. Second, these writing acts coupled with focusing on the survival post-trauma aid in self-reinvention. I expand upon these two purposes to insist that reinvention of the self cannot remove the wound, and must incorporate it within this new identity, using past experiences to affect present and futures ones. Thus, I ultimately argue that the wound will never vanish, but the wounded can re-identify herself as something more—as a *healer*.

Christina Baldwin explains that journal writings “are attempts to heal the split in the human mind and in the human experience” (80). In fact, life-writing acts of varying genres can, and do, serve as a means to piece, or re-piece together the fragments, the splits. And these attempts may never completely succeed; however, these acts of writing may aid in re-creating a more positive internalized image of the self post-trauma. Whereas trauma ruptures the self—

¹¹⁴ Anaïs Nin’s *Diary of Anaïs Nin: Volume One, 1931-1934*, will be cited as simply *Diary*. I should note that this citation is contextualized in her diary with a conversation with Allendy, one of her psychoanalysts.

sometimes losing the self completely—writing has the potential to aid in recovering a sense of self, a sense of worth.¹¹⁵

As Judith Harris explains, “[T]he act of writing—particularly when writing is about pain—can facilitate a careful process of self-construction and renewal” (xv). Thus, there is a duality that writer must negotiate, mediating between keeping the trauma alive in a space that may potentially re-create the pain and bringing the trauma to light in order to acknowledge a re-invented self. And to facilitate the latter, life-writing should depict a *changed* self, a changed story. Thus, despite Nin’s overt awareness that her journal is ‘embellished’ and a sort of ‘vice,’ it is more. Her acts of writing do in fact open up healing spaces, allowing her not only to explore her many images of herself but also to perform altered versions of her ‘self’ through and by creating. Similarly, Fraser’s writing acts allow her to re-construct the child she once was while simultaneously writing beyond this childhood image of her self, confronting the memory and emotions while changing her perspective towards them and her past.

Life-writings become testimonies to the fact that the ‘victim’ has lived past victimization. Thus, in a way, the very story itself becomes a product, representing, symbolizing, and even remembering survival (Caruth 64). However, because the product has the potential to focus on only the wound, the victimization, along with the position of powerlessness; I insist that considering the process and purpose of writing assists in the stage of reinventing the self—in creating the self anew, like Nin, Allison, Anzaldúa, and Fraser. These women may engage with “a complicated interplay of subject and object positions” when writing, having to view

¹¹⁵ In chapter two, I mention that the traumatic experience may result feelings of internalized guilt, shame, self-blame, and in extreme cases, “she may lose the sense that she has any self at all” (Herman 86).

themselves as objects in a narrative (Harris xiv).¹¹⁶ But the objectification of self is removed when considering healing processes and purposes—and reinventing the self with a new *mestiza*.

Like Bertha Pappenheim, who engages with expressive writing acts, women who write their stories of trauma and partake in acts of creation engage in writing processes that work towards their healing processes. I turn to Suzette Henke to elaborate:

Testimonial life-writing allows the author to share an unutterable tale of pain and suffering, of transgression or victimization, in a discursive medium that can be addressed to everyone or no-one—to a world that will judge personal testimony as accurate historical witnessing or as thinly disguised fiction. *No matter. It is through the very process of rehearsing and reenacting a drama of mental survival that the trauma narrative effects psychological catharsis* (xviii-xix, my emphasis).

‘No matter. It is through the process of rehearsing and reenacting...survival...’ But it is more. It is through acknowledging a new, different self, through acknowledging the creative flow of the never-ending ‘processes’ while simultaneously focusing on the purpose at hand—that of healing. Such combined efforts work towards reinventing the self as more than ‘wounded,’ as a healer. In other words, these writing acts for the purpose of healing allow the once ‘wounded’ to move beyond static internalizations and representations and towards recognizing that she is indeed a ‘healer,’ a positive image with a new purpose.

I reiterate Caruth’s point of repetition, as it re-affirms, again and again, a self who exists post-trauma, a self who has survived: “Repetition, in other words, is not simply the attempt to grasp that one has almost died, but more fundamentally and enigmatically, the very attempt *to claim one’s own survival*” (64, her emphasis). Thus, writing may be associated with repetition compulsion, with re-opening the wound, but focusing on this alone neglects to highlight that the

¹¹⁶ Harris’s exact quote is attributed to “confessional writing [of any nature]” (xiv).

self has changed and that the self is writing, is expressing, is creating, is moving with her own healing processes and purposes. By asserting this claim, I insist that she becomes redefined as a healer, whose process(es) will not and cannot end—as these life-writings “[are] the ongoing creation of the story of life” (Baldwin 80).

And this ongoing ‘creation of the story of life’ begins with acknowledging the ‘ongoing creation of the story’ of the self, a self who works towards healing...

Therapeutic Practices of Narrating the Story as Healing

Associating the act of narrating the story with healing the self is not new; there are fields of study dedicated to the healing potentials of expressive arts. Thus, in addition to Herman pointing out that telling the story of trauma is the second stage of recovery, expressive acts have been associated with healing for centuries. In this section, I briefly outline this historical association, focusing primarily within therapeutic fields where words and healing have been linked. After which, I move to literary applications, specifically Henke and how she links the two, arguing that an *overt* connection to healing and the therapeutic benefits of narrating the story better intersects the person post-trauma with her process(es) and purpose(s) of writing, tapping into and re-creating her entire self.

History

The association between words and healing may be traced back to the ancient Greeks, who “are credited with being one of the earliest people to intuitively conceive of the importance of words and feelings to both poetry and healing” (Mazza 5).¹¹⁷ Although the association began in times of antiquity, current associations are typically attributed to creative art therapies. Such

¹¹⁷ Refer also to Cathy A. Malchiodi’s “Expressive Therapies: History, Theory, and Practice” as well as The National Federation of Biblio/Poetry Therapy (NFBPT) Guidebook, which further points out that the arts and healing are even linked with the god Apollo, the god of poetry and medicine, art and healing (7). For a detailed historical account of the development of the field, refer to Mazza’s book or to the online NFBPT training guide.

fields range from Art Therapy to Dance Therapy to Play Therapy. For the purpose of my project, this section is primarily focused on the creative art therapies that directly relate to words and healing.

Creative art therapies is a field that “became more widely known during the 1930s and 1940s when psychotherapists and artists began to realize that self-expression through nonverbal methods such as painting, music making, or movement might be helpful” (Malchiodi, “Expressive,” 5).¹¹⁸ However, Malchiodi explains that this ‘field’ existed intuitively during the Renaissance by referring to two specific Renaissance scholars: “[Robert Burton] theorized that imagination played a role in health and well-being while Italian philosopher de Fektre proposed that dance and play were central to children’s healthy growth and development” (“Expressive,” 5).

Scholars began to build upon these ideas, and in the late sixties, the ‘use of poetry’ was recognized and labeled as *therapy*. Around 1969, Jack Leedy became the founding father of poetry therapy (Gorelick 119). Poetry therapy and bibliotherapy are used interchangeably “to describe the intentional use of poetry and other forms of literature for healing and personal growth” (Malchiodi, “Expressive,” 3). However, this definition implies that poetry therapy is dependent upon already written products to instigate healing. Such is not my focus. Rather, I draw attention to the *act* of writing, which leads me to another therapeutic practice—Narrative Therapy.

Around the same time, narrative therapy was born, heightening decades later with Michael White and David Epston’s book titled *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*. As explained by Catrina Brown and Tod Augusta-Scott, “Within narrative therapy, it is believed that

¹¹⁸ Malchiodi explains that “use of enactment as a way to restore mental health” began in 1923 with Joseph Moreno (5).

changing people's stories about their lives can help to change their actual lives" (xvii). Thus, "[w]e make sense of our lives through stories" (Brown and Augusta-Scott xii). Or rather, "experience must be 'storied' and it is this story that determines the meaning ascribed to experience" (White and Epston 10). Furthermore, it is claimed that "meaning is derived through the structuring of experience into stories" (White and Epston 27).

I turn to Virginia Woolf to engage further with this concept. In *Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings*, Virginia Woolf writes,

I receive the sudden shocks, they are not always welcome...I make it real by putting it into words. It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole; this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me; it gives me, perhaps because by doing so I take away the pain, a great deal delight to put the severed parts together.¹¹⁹

Woolf's words stress that individuals partially experience the traumatic event at the time of occurrence, but they also explain her therapeutic benefits of writing by claiming that she did not feel the pain once she ascribed meaning to her 'sudden shocks'—once she could 'story' what had occurred, once she assigned language to the 'sudden shocks.' Thus, Woolf creates a story that she can understand, noting that the 'shocks' no longer have the 'power to hurt [her].' However, this story and this meaning by no way imply that her story is final or accurate. Rather, her story—and its illusion of closure, even if it is only temporary—offer an understanding, allowing her to grapple better with her 'sudden shocks.'

But does this explanation mean that Woolf was 'healed' and became 'whole'?

Does narrative therapy create a therapeutic end?

I insist that such definitive concepts are, indeed, impossible outcomes. Furthermore, narrative therapy and its practice hold the potential to neglect the pandoric elements that I

¹¹⁹ DeSalvo also cites this quote in her text (5).

associate with stories of trauma. Ignoring the return to the trauma, the repetition, the lack of narration, the lack of language. And in a way, it may even ignore the ‘wound’ as it presently affects the person. In short, narrative therapy, if emphasizing both ‘meaning’ and ‘end,’ does not transfer completely when considering literary applications of therapeutic practices and engaging with women authors who write and publish their stories.

Literary Applications

Although the above fields in therapy have threads that connect to my topic, neither poetry therapy nor narrative therapy quite works. Furthermore, to claim that associations between writing processes and healing have not been made would be inaccurate. Thus, this section engages with such while contending that this concept, as well, does not transfer for my project—ignoring to combine completely product, process, purpose, and person.

Literary and feminist scholar Suzette Henke engages with the ‘need,’ the drive to write one’s story post-trauma by examining female writers and their products as attempts to piece together “shattered subjects.” Her research is predicated upon what she termed “scriptotherapy” in 1985, a theory that she outlined at the Modern Language Association (Henke xii). Henke explains that scriptotherapy is “the *process* of writing out and writing through traumatic experience in the mode of *therapeutic reenactment*. [She] argued that the authorial effort to reconstruct a story of psychological debilitation could offer potential for mental healing and begin to alleviate persistent symptoms” (xii, my emphasis).

Such a claim was affirming to find. However, such a claim is not without its faults. Henke explains her concept of ‘scriptotherapy’ as a means “of reinventing the shattered self as a *coherent subject* capable of meaningful *resistance* to received ideologies and of effective agency in the world” (xix, my emphasis). I need not reiterate my stance on bringing too much attention

to ‘resistance’ or my stance on the impossibility of a complete ‘coherent’ self. Rather, I merely note that her concepts diverge from mine.

Furthermore, her application neglects to highlight an emphasis on creation, creativity, creating... an emphasis that I stand firmly in making... an emphasis that does link my claims closely with creative expressive therapeutic practices.

Henke’s term *does* imply a therapeutic link—‘*scriptotherapy*.’ However, I contend that her attempt to bring the fields together falls short due to her neglecting to explicitly link the two. Rather, Henke negotiates her literary and feminist placement—avoiding the crossover and staying within an ‘appropriate’ literary discourse, specifically textual analysis that draws on psychoanalysis.

Henke acknowledges her intersections between literature and psychoanalysis, but neglects to incorporate the field of creative expression. Maybe bringing that into her mix was ‘too much,’ too risky? Maybe bringing that into her mix would open a negative Pandora’s box because it focused ‘too much’ on the personal? I ask these questions because Henke does admit that her claims “may have struck [her MLA] audience as more psychoanalytic than literary, and even somewhat marginal to the field” (xiii). Thus, maybe Henke negotiated her theoretical claims within her literary and feminist placement as much as felt she could—while maintaining her credibility as a literary and feminist scholar.

But I contend that, while Henke may have been bold in the mid-80s, it is time to move beyond superficial links to the therapeutic benefits of writing stories post-trauma, opening up opportunities to recognize and engage with healing efforts. In doing so, we, as scholars, will simultaneously engage with the pandoric nature of it all. Of the trauma. Of life-writing. Of

feminine writing. Accepting the unknowns. And highlighting that person, product, purpose, and process cannot be disconnected. And both creative and healing processes move and flow...

Again and again...

In stories that reflect the self... A self who is wounded. A self who is a healer.

The man raped me. It's the truth. It's a fact.

I was five, and he was eight months married to my mother.

Allison's words. Allison's wounds.

Allison's return to her story.

Allison's story that aids in re-inventing her self as a healer.

Moving Beyond Wounded

The therapeutic practices of narrating the story as described above depend too much and too little upon therapy as a field. As explained by Alan Parry and Robert E. Doan in their text *Story Re-Vision: Narrative Therapy in the Postmodern World*, "The goal of the work of therapy...basically came down to obtaining a better understanding or clearer perspective of the world so that a person can find his/her place in it" (14). But I alter this goal when linking therapeutic benefits of writing with healing the self. Instead, I stress that the goal is to continually engage with healing processes that return to the purpose of re-inventing the self as a healer and the text as a product that heals. Thus, the goal is not solely based upon 'find[ing]' a place; it is based upon creating anew... Again and again... Through stories that are performed. Through stories that never-end.

In this section, I use the above two points of stories in order to reiterate that an intermodal approach better captures pandoric aspects while mediating between narrative and non-narrative and while linking to creation, creativity, creating. To do so, I focus on the above two specific

aspects of the story, using Allison as an example, to stress that the story is ultimately a form of creative expression that engages with the (wounded) self to re-construct a (healing) self. A self that is always wounded. A self that is more than wounded. A self that engages with movement and flow, with her creativity in order to *move* with, in order to move beyond her wounds, altering them from static images that represent victimization. Such alterations move towards focusing on the active aspect of writing, of creating, of healing post-trauma. Allowing individuals to become healers. Thus, these writers write and re-write their stories and themselves anew.

And as Brown and Augusta-Scott write, “[S]tories are active—they constitute us. The stories we tell are the stories we live. When we write new stories of our lives, we live new stories” (xix). So we, as scholars, should ‘write’ a new story where women and their stories move towards healing...

Story as Performance

Allison is aware of the fact that the story is a form of self-performance. Noting the fact that she is a storyteller, she explains that she will “work to make you believe [her]” (3). Thus, she highlights that her performance and selection of material are dependent upon formulating a trusting position as a narrator. She continues to engage with the story as performance, her selection of content and tone:

Throw in some real stuff, change a few details, add the certainty of outrage. I know the use of fiction in a world of hard truth. The story of what happened, or what did not happen but should have—that story can become a curtain drawn shut, a piece of insulation, a disguise, a razor, a tool that changes every time it is used and sometimes becomes something other than we intended.

The story becomes the thing needed (3).

These words stress that the story when related to trauma ‘becomes the thing needed’ for survival and that this story does carry with it a level of performance that may, but may not, be controlled by the teller. Using Allison as an impetus, I contend that the story has been and will be continued to be linked to levels of performance. However, such notions should be expanded in order to encompass how performance becomes representative of acts of creative expression while simultaneously working towards reinvention.

Analyzing the multiple versions of Allison’s story, literary and feminist scholar Leigh Gilmore explains, “In [Allison’s] published performance piece, *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure* (1995), written in the months after she completed *Bastard*, Allison pushes forward a ‘let me tell you a story’ version of her life” (62). Gilmore points out Allison’s repetitive patterns, both in structure and in multiple versions of the story of trauma. In addition, Gilmore stresses the fact that this last version has an overt performance aspect.

Allison’s performance holds an oral aspect with her repeated phrase: ‘Let me tell you a story.’ Her use of ‘you’ links her to her audience, inviting them into an act that directly points out their involvement. Furthermore, Allison acknowledges that her story involves selection. She writes, “*Behind the story I tell is the one I don’t*” (39, her emphasis).

As therapists White and Epston reiterate, both selection and performance exist when narrating. However, they expand this notion of performance to highlight how these acts aid in self reinvention while also mentioning the role of interpretations and internalizations. They write, “Since the stories that persons have about their lives determine both the ascription of meaning to experience and the selection of those aspects of experience that are to be given to expression, these stories are constitutive or shaping of persons’ lives. The lives and relationships

of persons evolve as they live through or perform these stories” (40).¹²⁰ Thus, when considering the act of narrating the story post-trauma, it is important to view the writing and/or re-writing of the story as a re-writing of the self—not just a performance, despite the performing aspects that are undoubtedly embedded within stories. Thus, stories that are performed become contributors in furthering self-development—as the two are intimately connected.

Such aspects of narrating only add to the benefits of life-writing, allowing the author to take control of who she is as well as the depiction of this self. And with both performance and selection, hope can unfold when considered the therapeutics of writing. As Brown and Augusta-Scott state, “[A] therapeutic approach is one of possibility, of hope, enabling the rewriting and subsequent reliving of one’s lives through more helpful stories” (xx).

(Narrating the) Story as Never-Ending

Allison’s story of trauma is indeed repeated. Over and over.

A process that does not end.

Like Nin, whose diaries exist in different versions, Allison’s story varies...

As Leigh Gilmore explains, Allison has just written about her trauma in her fictional account titled *Bastard out of Carolina*. So did that not fulfill the need to write, to story her trauma? Did that story not allow her to assign meaning and understand better those traumatic events that are so difficult to grasp? Thus, I am compelled to ask why write about her story again and again... In varying forms... This section engages with the existence of multiple versions, multiple stories through the context of therapeutic benefits and healing processe(s) to contend the story is never complete.

The fact that her stories exists in multiple forms (and at times, even fragments) is truer to the idea that one is never completely healed, that trauma can never be completely realized, and

¹²⁰ These therapists stress the “re-authoring” of lives by “externalizing” experiences (41).

that a drive to become a complete ‘coherent’ self is impossible. Thus, Allison, like many who have experienced a trauma, has a need, a drive not just to write the story—but to write and re-write and re-write it. Because of this repetitive need, the seemingly ‘whole’ existence of textual (re)presentations is pandoric. Both a ‘whole’ story. While being a ‘part’ of a story. And such notions support the idea that creative acts of narrating the story are never-ending processes.

The idea of repetition is linked to these multiple versions as well as the stories that are interpreted. And Allison is aware that the two do not always link. She writes, “*Behind the story you hear is the one I wish I could make you hear* (Allison 39, my emphasis). Furthermore, Allison’s repetition is associated with her narrative structure—the feminine poetics of repetition. Gilmore touches upon this structure, stating the following:

No longer focusing on the incest material as it impacts her relationship with lovers and co-workers as she did in *Trash*, Allison returns to the women in her family, to class, race, poverty, incest, and illegitimacy. The impossible story is still the one she must tell, but because she has just told it in *Bastard*, she can reflect on the narrative structures the story required (62).

While Gilmore attempts to justify the multiple versions of the story, I contend that the story and the trauma are never-ending. Thus, there will be a need to tell *and re-tell* her story—an ‘impossible story’ that is never-ending.

Gilmore’s words do imply that the latest version acts as vehicle that link her story with a creative narrative structure that is deliberate and premeditated. Furthermore, Gilmore emphasizes the attention to narrative structure, implying that structure of the story holds its own set of implications that should be considered.

Agreeing with this, I insist that the structure itself implies that the story is never-ending. Creating a ‘let me tell you a story’ version of her narrative, Allison repeats this one phrase—not as a compulsive repetition alone. Rather, the focus and repetition assist in ‘returning’ to the need to re-invent the self, to story the self, to engage with healing processes that *move*... Such movement and flow refuses to create an image, a story that is static. Thus, I contend that the need to engage with a story that is never complete links to the need to reconstruct an identity that was once wounded...

A process that is itself never complete.

A process that is *not* circular in nature...

Rather, a process that is spiral,

with no beginning and no ending.

The Spiral Story as Healing

From start to finish to starting again, Allison’s text spirals in creative flow which is evident both in structure and in topic, and this spiraling brings her and her readers back to various, fragmented memories while sustaining a nonlinear and circular motif—a feminine poetics that stresses the return to the story of trauma, but yet never quite returns to the same story.

Thus, the story spirals...

Re-creating. Her self.

Re-creating. Her story.

A story that is repetitive, a story Gilmore acknowledges to be ‘[t]he impossible story.’

A story that Allison has a ‘need’ to tell. Over and over again.

Spiraling back...

In this section, I extend this act of telling and re-telling to be directly related to the drive to heal post-trauma—a drive that spirals and returns to the story. To do so, I first engage with Christina Baldwin’s “spiral of experience” to argue that healing is a never-ending process (100). After which, I assert that healing itself occurs in spiral processes that are linked to the act of creation. Such a claim emphasizes that the spiral story aids in healing processes by re-creating the internalized image of the entire self—body, mind, and *creative spirit* post-trauma.

Baldwin outlines a “spiral of experience” diagram to demonstrate how every personal experience has the potential to allow a movement from chaos to peace (100). When explaining this spiral of experiences, Baldwin emphasizes that “[w]e aren’t changing our past: we are changing the links, changing the interpretation” (126). Baldwin’s argument mirrors a therapeutic stance, insisting that perspective and interpretation should focus on positive and hopeful outcomes. Thus, Baldwin highlights that changes are made possible by (re)visiting memories at different points in life, using different lenses and focusing on the insight that comes with new experiences. And with this process, individuals ‘begin to reclaim [their] sense of self’ after having lost it.

Baldwin explains this process: “In the survivor’s tale, we work with an experience to a point where we can begin *to reclaim our sense of self* as one who now includes this changed circumstance” (105, my emphasis). Despite the fact that her theory neglects to account for the split psychoanalytic self, Baldwin’s points accurately describe the repetitive nature of self-analysis through recounting the story while implying that complete self-discovery does not occur at once. In fact, complete self-analysis is impossible. But recovering tidbits of insight is indeed possible.

Furthermore, returning to those moments that have made a significant impact on identity formation is crucial in self-actualization. Baldwin continues, “In working with the spiral of experience, significant moments come back around again and again, allowing us to harvest insight...[giving] the opportunity to reflect and articulate the still unexplored territory of our stories” (109). Thus, stories emerge and re-emerge, spiraling back around again and again, and each experience is different. Furthermore, each experience holds the potential to become an opportunity for insight.

And each experience, to reiterate Caruth, should remind the survivor that she has survived. Thus, the ‘spiral of experience’ holds the potential for individuals to analyze past experiences while integrating new links to and with these experiences into their life-stories, their life-writings. Baldwin writes, “As we live inside the integration story, our experience becomes less urgent and more philosophical. We may speak of it less often, but it rises in us when there is space and receptivity” (109).

Ideally, yes. However, I challenge the dismissal of urgency—as every story of trauma should carry with a sense of urgency, no matter how philosophical it becomes or how integrated into the new life-story it has merged. One aspect is certain; the trauma story ‘rises...when there is space and receptivity.’

Healed Versus Healing

The trauma story returns. Repeatedly. In different ways. For varying reasons. Sparked by sensations that trigger flashbacks. Returning to moments that spiral back to an earlier time. Thus, the process is never complete.

Because of this, I make an overt distinction between the terms *healed* and *healing*.

And to claim that the act of writing the trauma story *healed* neglects to account for the return of the trauma that will inevitable happen.

Implying that there is a definitive, clear-cut outcome.

Implying that one moves on without ever returning to the traumatic memories.

Implying an end to the trauma.

This is not the case.

As explained, trauma never vanishes.

In addition, healing is a continual process.

It exists in a spiral.

It exists as a journey.

And it exists on a continuum, unique and different for all.¹²¹

Thus, the term *healing* should be emphasized as it implies that the process is never completely ‘fixed’—and thus, one cannot be completely *healed*. In addition, healing involves that we do not attempt ‘to fix it.’ Rather, as Shaun McNiff elaborates, the process requires presence more than anything. He writes, “Healing occurs when we [are] open to the expression of an image and do our best to be present with it, understand it, rather than attempting to fix it, resolve it, or eradicate it” (McNiff 98).

In addition to the idea that *healing* is a never-ending process, I stress the spiral motion involved. As Herman explains, “One therapist describes the progression through the stages of recovery as a spiral” (115). A key aspect about the ‘spiral’ movement lies in the idea that the spiral creates the image of a place “in which earlier issues are continually revisited on a *higher*

¹²¹ I note that the existence of a healing continuum is intuitive, as everyone, every journey is different. Furthermore, trauma exists in varying and individual “degrees” of trauma, according to Janice Haaken (355). (“The Recovery of Memory, Fantasy, and Desire in Women’s Trauma Stories: Feminist Approaches to Sexual Abuse and Psychotherapy.” In *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*. Eds. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. [Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998: 352-361].)

level of integration” (115, my emphasis). Thus, through presence and integration, revisiting memories, the repetition of narrating the story and return to traumas may be beneficial. This ‘higher level’ may not be immediate, and I would even speculate that there is room to digress from time to time. But the return to trauma spirals, and when stressing the positive and healing benefits, the act of recounting the story itself embraces these spirals as opportunities for healing.

Healing as a Spiral

As Gorelick states, “[M]oments unfurling as a spiral of development...means we reencounter old issues time and again, at a familiar, yet different, point” (122). Her continues, “Past, present, and future align in harmonic resonance in *the teachable moment of therapeutic encounter*” (Gorelick 122, my emphasis). Thus, the ‘moment’ is ‘teachable.’ The ‘encounter’ may be ‘therapeutic’ (which *is* different from therapy). Furthermore, there is no absolute here. In this section, I stress that healing is spiral—while stressing that this ‘spiral’ may not be immediately noticed. However, by altering perception from a circular repetition of neurotic compulsion—to a more productive spiral of creative experience—more positive associations unfold. And she who writes her story, her trauma, her self over and over again, in any form, in varying forms engages with her healing processes to reinvent continually her self as a healer.

In other words, the story moves allows one’s healing to spiral and develop. I reiterate that this healing “circles around, seeming to move backward yet rising to a higher level” (Malchiodi, *Soul*, 179-180). Thus, in order for this spiral to actually spiral in beneficial directions, or rather, towards better understanding, reflection, perspective, and action *are* important.

Such acts can lead to transformation.

Such acts were, and continue to be, present in my own writing, healing processes.

Six years. Of him. Of us.

Of my trauma, my story.

It was a spiral then and is a spiral now.

Different spirals.

But spirals, nonetheless.

At times I knew it was bad, and I wanted out.

I wrote about it, cried about it, and prayed about it.

For years, many of my journal entries echo the same thing, the same story, a spiral that never seemed to go anywhere, but never traced over the same moments.¹²²

12.21.03

All I could think of to say was, “Just Go Away.”

...

And I’m tired.

You sway me with your eyes locked in mine and your hand in my hair. But truth is you are only colorful briefly... and your watercolors will fade to black. They always do. You paint a pretty image when you want to.

And I buy it every time. I’m addicted to your art. But need to change my point of view.

The whole process is cyclic, and I spin round and round. Dizzy for you.

Until I’m exhausted with discomfort.

And that day has come again.

I need a break, and I need you to give it to me...

And this morning proved it.

...

But I need you, too.

More so, I need the absence of you.

A huge part of me wanted the relationship to end, the pain to stop. We talked about it several times. But he always seemed to find his way back into my life, and I always found myself back

¹²² Portions of these entries are removed, indicated by the ellipses. In addition, some of these journal entries are also embedded in my published advocacy article, albeit different fragments may have been extracted or retained for the purpose of that piece.

in his arms. He knew I would take him back. Because I did every time. It was our ‘spiral’ that we had created.

02.24.05

...

This time is different than all the ten-million times before. I went through the hate-phase, the pissed-phase, the numb-phase, and now, I’m in the hurt-phase.

...

I deleted everything—phone numbers and email addresses. But more importantly, I didn’t count the days.

...

We’ve fought more than anything this past year, and I’ve cried more than anyone. But after each fight, after each agreement to never talk again, I always counted the days until he called, until he apologized, until he came over again. Not this time.

...

I’m ending it again—only this time it’s for keeps.

...

I knew I was in a state of repetition.

Or rather, we were.

I knew his patterns—he would wait a couple days and then call apologizing.

We circled round and round. Going nowhere. Moving nowhere. Or at least that is what I thought. And at times, I thought that this was the way life had to be. Stuck with him. Stuck with my pain. Just. Stuck. Not recognizing that I was moving, that I was changing, that I was in a spiral.

10.10.04

...

The idiosyncrasies are too many, too great, and my inner-self mocks my life as it is cursed to be on the same cyclic ride. A carousel of events. Except I chose to remain...as if I’m begging for the stampede of pain.

I know this ride all too well, and nothing stops me from mounting again, and again.

...

Time and again. I know this fairy tale.
And Cinderella never wins.

...

Time and again, I've tried to let go. And sometimes I convince myself—and even him—that I did. But within a couple of days, I am coerced back on the ride, and the events go round and round. And we...well, we never go anywhere.

...

At times, it seemed better.

Honest.

And at times, it was great.

He was great.

But other times, it seemed worse.

Way worse.

06.05.05

I told him that my life felt worthless, and it does. It does almost every time after I am with him, with his lies, his false promises. And I cannot do it, not any more. I cannot take the pain, the hurt, the tears. I want out. And I want more.

I want this life to end. And a new one to begin.

And I'm ready to move on, to let go.

It's taken me a while. But I have to give up this fight.

...

But as for now, the 'me' that was his is dead. And I'm trying and learning how to live without him.

...

And I must let the memories die if I want to laugh again, to love again, to live again.

Please God give me the strength to move on. And give him the strength to let me go.

...

I had breakdowns. I cried. I wanted to change. But was scared. On June 29, 2004, I wrote, "I think he'd love for me to stay the same. It's so nice, so convenient, so consistent. For him. But it's my own hell. And a part of me is scared to even verbalize the need to leave." But writing about it seemed safe(r). And gave me a venue to reflect. Re-read. Return to those stories. Alter my perspective and my ways. And eventually, in 2007, I left. I ended *that* story. So new ones

could truly begin. Albeit ones that are still connected to those as well as the ones that have yet to come into existence.

I include my journals to insert my personal stories and spirals. But also, I include them to stress the individual factor, the unique writing and healing processes, the idea that writing may have not immediately revealed a profound revelation, this one, missing link that would ‘fix’ me. Nor did writing always result in pleasure alone. I would be a liar if I claimed so. In fact, I often cried when writing these entries. I mention this, not to focus on the pleasure, or pain, or the combination of both, that I received when writing. But to highlight that the act *moved* me. Sometimes to tears. Other times, just by the physical act of writing—moving me from a static powerless position to a creating, a generating one. Thus, writing can offer a space to work with and through energies, releasing emotions, enabling one to be present with the pain while tapping into pleasurable moments linked to creation, creating anew... linked to the *creative spirit*. I reiterate that writing *is* closely linked to creative flow, moving with and through static traumas... and such movement and creative flow aid in redefining the wounded self.

A Return to Creativity

I return to Virginia Woolf, who exclaims that piecing together her ‘shocks’ makes her traumatic experience ‘whole.’ However, her statement simultaneously focuses on the act of creation, stressing that ‘it gives [her]...a great deal delight to put the severed parts together.’ Thus, I focus on the *pleasure* that comes with the act of creation—a pleasure sparked by being present in the moment of creative expression, a pleasure that is linked to the active creative processes. Re-membering. Re-constructing. Re-creating. Author and critic bell hooks reiterates similar notions: “Writing was the healing place where I could collect the bits and pieces, where I could put them together again...[and] [r]emembering was part of a cycle of

reunion, a joining of fragments, ‘the bits and pieces of my heart’ that the narrative made whole again” (*remembered* 7, 87).

Writing is a process, a movement, *a verb*.

Writing became hooks’s ‘healing place.’ Her ‘narrative’ product may have made these ‘pieces’ of her fragmented life ‘whole again’—but it is an illusion of wholeness, as I stress that this ‘whole’ is impossible and is a ‘whole’ that is pandoric, which includes the parts. Parts that came before, and parts that come after, and parts that cannot be captured presently. Furthermore, both hooks and Woolf highlight that their pleasure is directly related to more than the product. Thus, neither the purpose nor process can be ignored. And emphases link to *creating* their narratives.

I close this chapter by focusing overtly on a return to the creativity involved as a means to engage with healing efforts. In other words, I stress the idea that it is the *act* of creative construction within continual ‘cycle[s],’ continual spirals that ultimately allow these women to better engage with their healing, healing that is never-ending. To do so, I first reiterate that trauma affects the entire self—the body, mind, and creative spirit. Only this time, I engage with scholars such as Jane Piirto and Alice Miller to expand this connection by linking creativity as a ‘response’ to the trauma for ‘healing’ efforts. After which, I turn to creative expression therapists such as Malchiodi and Capacchione to insist that forms of creative expression, mediate between order and disorder, in order to experience flow, and it is within these moments where healing is at its peak. Thus, with every return to creativity, authors move with writing and healing processes that work towards (re)constructing the self—as both creator and healer.

Louise DeSalvo writes, “Creativity...seems [to be] a basic human response to trauma” (*Writing*, 175). And “[c]reativity and imagination are often expanded during times of trauma or

loss” (Malchiodi, *Soul*, 148). Such claims are validated when thinking about famous individuals who are known for their creativity and have been identified as having suffered traumas. Jane Piirto engages with some of these individuals, dedicating an entire chapter on creative writers. In this particular chapter, Piirto acknowledges that “[p]sychoanalysts and psychologists have often stated that writers write because of deep-seated pathologies” (194).¹²³ And even Harry B. Lee and Andrew Brink explain that trauma experiences tend to yield a “strong stimulus to the imagination,” further developing creativity (qtd in DeSalvo 175). Thus, I reiterate that connections between these entities *have* been made by scholars and throughout my dissertation; however, I mention these claims here in order to link creativity with healing efforts—efforts that work towards re-creating the image of the self.

These efforts are linked to a drive, a need to write, to create, to heal...

And this drive ‘to create’ is a purpose associated with creating not only a story but also a new self, a new internalized identity. As Phil Cousineau explains in his text titled *Stoking the Creative Fires: 9 Ways to Rekindle Passion and Imagination*, “To create means to make something new, original, fresh, and vital. The very origins of the word go back to the Latin *creare*, ‘to grow, to make order out of chaos,’ revealing the depths of this irrepressible impulse” (21). Thus, when the purpose is linked to reconstructing the self anew, it makes ‘order out of chaos’—and when associating a self who has been traumatized and who appears to represent only a wound, only the chaotic disorder with a *new* purpose, one that is active and creative, the ‘traumatized’ and ‘wounded’ woman becomes a writer, a creator, a healer...

Such redefinitions alter the stories of these women. Such redefinitions allow growth. And more so, such redefinitions move beyond neurotic behaviors that foster the wound. As

¹²³ Piirto refers to creativity theorists Barron and his studies that become the foundation for his stance that “writers seem to be psychologically both sicker and healthier...the writers may have psychological problems, but they also have inner strength” (193).

Cousineau continues, “The breakthrough comes when you realize that not to create is not to grow, not to emerge out of chaos, which, as psychologists reminds us, is to court neurosis” (21). Even Nin notes the importance of labels and the significance of self-definition. By labeling herself as an artist, she works towards her own healing. She writes, “[t]he artist goes beyond the neurotic” (*Diary*, 200). And I contend that linking the product, process, purpose, and person re-writes the ‘wounded woman/victim’ as a ‘wounded healer’—of self and others. So...

Let me tell you a story...

The man raped me. It's the truth. It's a fact.

I was five, and he was eight months married to my mother.

Allison had a choice. She could allow the trauma to continue to overpower her self, or she could assert control and re-write her self—as a storyteller, as a performer, as an artist, as a healer. As Alice Miller notes, “[P]eople respond to childhood trauma with creativity or with destruction” (Piirto engaging with Miller, 165). In other words, trauma’s affect on the psyche has the potential to be either creative or destructive. In addition, trauma may also be both creative *and* destructive. But the key is to return to the creative, the acts of expression that are linked to creating, to healing... Thus, I reiterate that stories of trauma are not told for a ‘destructive’ act of ‘breaking’ alone, but ‘for the sake of creating.’

Creating anew,

creating positive images post-trauma that stress healing.

Cathy A. Malchiodi asserts, “Creative work is a natural flow-inducer that helps us to shut out chaos, focus our energies, and experience exhilaration” (*Soul*, 25). This one phrase highlights the fact that the act of creating is advantageous while simultaneously stressing the flow and movement involved. Furthermore, as Capacchione asserts, “[The creative process is]

the place where the paradigm shift occurs, the new order is emerging...[and people learn] to accept feelings of confusion and the panic of not knowing,” developing new senses of self-actualization (160-161). Thus, by moving, by expressing, by creating, women are more than wounded, and their stories are told for even more than ‘the sake of creating.’

They are told for the sake of healing...

healing the self and healing others.

This is a story that links the story post-trauma to healing... So...

Let me tell you a story...

And... As Allison assert, and I stress, “I can tell you anything. All you have to believe is the truth” (94).

6 MORE THAN WORDS: HEALING SELF AND OTHERS

*Story is the narrative thread
of our experience—not what literally happens,
but what we make out of what happens
- Baldwin (xi)*

In the previous chapter, I insist that the story of trauma assists in re-inventing the self post-trauma. When such acts of creative expression are linked with sustained movement, the product becomes closely connected with process and person and purpose, allowing the potential for heightened healing experiences. Having explored this idea that women who have experienced a trauma have a need to write, to create, and to re-invent, I now move to unpack healing processes further. In this chapter, I contend that both the story of trauma and the story healing are communal stories—and this communal aspect should be highlighted as no story exists in a vacuum. Thus, I claim that healing reinvents the ‘self,’ but it is not an individual act, no matter how unique the experience, no matter how personal the story, no matter how cathartic the self expression. Thus, this chapter connects the self with others.

Specifically, I first stress the idea that stories are socially constructed. Next, I point out that individuals recognize their story in and through another’s story. I do so by referring to example using Dorothy Allison’s and Louise DeSalvo’s texts. Afterwards, I assert that such stories become catalysts to connect to others, referring to hooks’s memoir. The significance for such connections is three-fold: to validate the re-invented self, to link to the past, and to establish sustained bonds in the present for a better future.

Because these ideas are grounded upon the concept of bearing witness, I interrogate this well-known concept, claiming that it is a problematic phrase that dismisses individual experiences and implies a one-way interaction. Next, I offer an alternative, proposing that Baldwin’s concept of storycatching be used. Such a change would create a stronger sense of

interconnectedness while simultaneously stressing the importance of the personal story as one link in a larger healing process, increasing social and cultural awareness for all participants. I close the chapter with a case analysis of DeSalvo's text to stress that healing involves more than language, more than words; it involves interconnectedness—as well as hope and love.

The Story as Socially Constructed

According to Baldwin, “Story—the abundance of it, and the lack of it—gives us place, lineage, history, a sense of self. Story...breaks us into pieces, shatters our understanding, and gives it back over and over again, the story different every time” (3). Thus, the act of narrating the story assists in self-development, self-actualization. This section highlights that no self exists in isolation, and it and stories are both socially constructed.

Baldwin continues to explain story. She writes, “Story...connects us with the world and outlines our relationship with everything” (Baldwin 3). Such is true. However, the notion of story ‘connects us with the world’ while the notion of ‘the world’ affects the stories told. In other words, story is socially constructed. And “[t]here is no transcendental self-story, just as there is no transcendental subject. In other words, there is no self outside the social world,” as Brown and Augusta-Scott confirm (xxviii).

Stories, in general, exist within a context that exceeds the individual. In other words, no story can exist individually—as we do not exist individually. This is explained concisely by Judith Butler in her text titled *Giving an Account of Oneself*: “[T]he ‘I’ has no story of its own that is not also the story of a relation—or set of relation—to a set of norms...” (8). Instead, stories are social and cultural constructs—as individuals exist within relationships, environments, communities, and even within cultural ideologies.

Furthermore, Brown and Augusta-Scott note, “Dependent on language and social convention, storytelling is necessarily intersubjective, both reflecting and reproducing shared social meanings” (xxx). Such connections to social constructions and reproductions are hard to ignore. However, they highlight that stories *are* connected to larger social stories. In addition, these ideas imply that if the stories we, as a society, tell change, focusing more on the positive and healing aspects post-trauma, then these changes may affect the society at large—as stories hold the potential to produce new meanings. Thus, stories may be socially constructed, but they also construct.

Recognizing Our Story in Another’s Story

Equally important to note is the fact that stories intertwine individuals with others, creating and strengthening relationships among those who share in the act of exchanging stories. These relationships are not static.

They change.

They move.

And they open up opportunities to discover...

connections with others

and pieces of the self.

In this section, I assert that part of the beauty of engaging with others’ stories is the potential for their stories to relate to our own, our ‘self’ images and stories. This may occur by recognizing similarities or differences between the stories, or the exposure to a particular story may act as encouragement to share, to attempt to narrate the story that the self never thought could be shared. Thus, the interaction involved holds the positive impact to assist in recognizing the self post-trauma. I turn to both Dorothy Allison and Louise DeSalvo as examples.

In *Skin: Talking about Sex, Class, and Literature*, Allison overtly relates to another woman, who was (or had been) in a similar position. Allison saw her feelings of alienation in this stranger. She saw her past; she saw her pain. Recognizing her ‘self’ in this woman, Allison was encouraged to return her story. But more importantly, she offered a piece of her story that had remained untold up until that point. Allison writes, “Listening to [that lady talk about her father], I remembered my own dreams...She was as close to breaking as I felt myself, as desperate and alone...It was the first time I had told anyone I wanted to kill my stepfather” (*Skin*, 52). She possibly began her words to demonstrate she could relate, to tell this lady she was not alone. But any motive is speculative. However, I do attest that “[w]ith words alone we create connection, establish community” (Baldwin xi). And the act of recounting the story is beneficial in establishing both a stronger sense of self and community.

Allison and the stranger created a bond with their stories. Their traumas are not exactly the same, but they found similarity in the feeling of abuse and pain. And because of their different-yet-similar stories, the two saw pieces of themselves, of their past, ever-present pains in each other.

In a way, when individuals ‘bear witness’ to others, they give themselves permission to look at themselves and their past pains (Baldwin 126). One on hand, it cannot be helped; people identify themselves through others. On the other hand, the act affirms individuals are not alone, implying that trauma is indeed ‘bearable.’

Such was the case for Louise DeSalvo.

Her dedication to studying Virginia Woolf, to ‘bearing witness’ to Woolf’s stories led to her looking at her ‘self,’ her own story. DeSalvo acknowledges this preoccupation with Virginia

Woolf as well as their similarities.¹²⁴ And she repeatedly mentions Woolf throughout her text (*Vertigo*, 3, 6, 224, 255). Furthermore, DeSalvo recognizes that Woolf's beliefs influence and strengthen her own, particularly the idea that writing heals. Engaging with Woolf's *Moments of Being*, DeSalvo explains, "Virginia Woolf said that the moments of profound insight that come from writing about our soulful, thoughtful examination of our psychic wounds should be called 'shocks'" (*Writing*, 5). Thus, it is fair to state that DeSalvo's connection to Woolf and to Woolf's stories becomes a vehicle into her own memories, her own stories, her own healing processes. DeSalvo declares, "As I am trying to recreate Virginia Woolf's childhood, I become impelled to remember mine" (*Vertigo*, 92).

Thus, I assert that Woolf—like others who have experienced traumatic pasts—should not, and cannot, be remembered solely as 'traumatized' or for their trauma alone. Rather, Woolf is a woman who holds a story that aids in allowing others to recognize pieces of themselves. Thus, as stressed in the previous chapter, she is not only a creator and a writer but also a healer.

Furthermore, she is part of a larger community, a larger story.

One that DeSalvo recognizes as her own.

One that encourages and empowers her.

She was not a famous author. Rather, she was a stranger who told me her story...

It was a little over a year ago.

I had gone to Buffalo, NY, to attend the annual Northeastern Modern Language Association conference, but as luck would have it, my returning flight was delayed. I say 'luck' because I was, at the time, annoyed to tears. But the occurrence was more serendipitous than I had realized.

¹²⁴ DeSalvo writes the following: "When I started my work on Woolf, I did not realize how similar her family was to mine..." (*Vertigo*, 11).

Not only was my flight delayed. But it was postponed for twenty-four hours. I just wanted to return home, to make my scheduled meetings, to meet a writing deadline, to do my to-do list. I stood at the desk trying to get re-routed to New Orleans, Gulfport, anywhere close enough to Baton Rouge. But the snow would not allow it. All flights had been canceled.

Accepting my one-day extended trip, compliments of Delta, I grabbed my luggage and went outside where I waited for the van that was shuttling us to hotels. I noticed a lady whom I had seen earlier, a lady with a distinctive straw hat; she was behind me at the counter and was now waiting for the same van. We exchanged smiles. No words were said.

The following morning, I said hello to her as we all waited for the van to shuttle us back to the airport. But it was not until we were seated at the same gate, waiting for the same airplane that we truly began to talk.

She had her masters. In what, I do not remember. She was a minister, thinking of exploring the possibility of becoming a spiritual director. We talked about our future, our past, our stories. And it was then that I realized that it was ‘luck’ that my plane was delayed.

She shared her story, one that resonated with my past, one that opened up possibilities for me to further grow in my own personal relationships. One that encouraged and empowered me to view my story as not only a ‘wounded’ story but also a ‘healing’ story... seeing myself, my past as being part of a larger story and having the potential to affect another positively.

We connected.

To each other.

To her story.

To my story.

We connected to a larger story.

As Lynn Lauber confirms, “There is no denying the power of stories to inspire, sustain, guide, console, soothe, and comfort. Writing provides companionship and access to larger community. Words link us and remind us that we are not alone” (27-28). Thus, through writing stories of trauma, individuals partake in a story where they are not alone, establishing connections to others while strengthening a sense of self.

In other words, such connections invite individuals to ‘bear witness’ to others while simultaneously ‘bearing witness’ to themselves—working towards healing. Healing themselves. And healing others. Christina Baldwin explains the link among stories, relational bonds, and individuals’ own stories best when she writes,

When someone else’s story activates our own memory, we enter the editing process with our own story. One of the healing properties of sharing our stories is the potential to reinforce each other’s positive choices and to model options that we may not have thought of on our own. We piggyback on each other’s experiences: through listening and reading we change our relationship to our own histories so that our experiences keep sustaining it... We give each other permission and expand each other’s ideas of how a situation can be survived (126).

Baldwin’s words elaborate on the process of recognizing one’s self in another’s story by stressing that another’s ‘positive choices’ assist in the self’s own ‘editing process’—becoming a positive impact and an example of survival. Thus, another’s story does not just reflect the ‘self’ to the individual—but simultaneously affirms that survival is possible. Thus, the trauma story acts as a connection not only to others but also to *survival*.

Trauma Story as Connections to Others and Survival

As mentioned in chapter five, the act of sharing the story of trauma validates that the individual has lived past the trauma. Thus, the story is an undeniable form of validation of an identity that exists post-trauma—be it a story heard or a story told. Both confirm survival and act as sources of empowerment. In this section, I extend this idea of the story as validation to reflect the continual process needed for healing to occur. Specifically, I stress that the story of trauma neither begins with the self nor ends with the self. Next, I assert that the third and final stage of recovery focuses on sustaining an identity post-trauma, and such requires the continual act of recounting the story.

The Story Neither Begins Nor Ends with the Self

Stories are relational, social, cultural—as is identity itself. In order to highlight the fact that the story of trauma is a story that exists beyond an individualized story and without beginning and ending, I engage with scholars Maxine Greene and Trinh T. Minh-ha before performing a case analysis of bell hooks's memoir.

According to educational scholar Maxine Greene, the life story cannot be *just* about one's life because no identity is constructed void of others. Greene writes, "I cannot truly say 'my life story.' That would imply that, spiderlike, I have somehow spun a web from my own being, when, in fact, I cannot exclude the context of my gender, sibling and maternal relationships, political and professional phenomena, and even aging decline from 'my self'" (74). Keeping this lack of complete, sole 'self' in mind, I turn to Catrina Brown's article "Dethroning the Suppressed Voice: Unpacking Experience as Story." When emphasizing that suppressed stories exist within dominant structures and always intertwined with the social, Brown also complicates

what is commonly thought of by ‘individual’ and ‘individual experience’—and thus, the *individual* story:

People make sense of their lives through developing accounts of themselves and their words. They organize and give meaning to their experiences through the storying of experience. Stories do not represent or mirror reality; they are constitutive, shaping our lives and relationships...Individual experience is, then, always more than subjective, as it is never outside cultural discourse and social relations. In this way, there is no singular author of experience (182).

Brown affirms that the act of ‘storying’ yields meaning, but her words highlight that no experience, no story exists in complete isolation.

People are interconnected—as are stories. As Trinh T. Minh-ha stresses, “In this chain and continuum, I am but one link...Every gesture, every word involves our past, present, and future” (122). Thus, stories about trauma *are* connected, transcending temporality.

I turn to bell hooks and her memoir *bone black: memories of girlhood* because hooks is an example of someone who writes her story not only to reinvent herself but also to stress the importance of storytelling and interconnectedness.¹²⁵ Like Anzaldúa, hooks creates not a traditional nonfiction, but not a fiction. Rather, she creates a third, hybrid text that creatively mediates between past and present, between truth and imagination, between social standards and something unexpected. By simply interchanging the pronoun used, hooks creates an ambiguity that becomes associated with her very identity. Such a mixing of first and third person pronoun throughout the text also disrupts the linear framework and temporal aspects of the storyline, as some chapters come across as present happenings while others as reflective memories. This rhetorical move captures the complications and confusions within her development of self

¹²⁵ For the purpose of this chapter, assume *bone black* when referring to hooks’s text unless noted otherwise.

because of her life struggles—struggles identified as race, class, domestic violence. Bouncing back between ‘I/me’ and ‘She/her,’ hooks does not completely own the ‘self’ that experienced these traumatic experiences. Rather, there is a distance and removal, and the alteration of the pronouns becomes symbolic of self reinvention.

hooks writes and re-writes her life—as she understands it, and wants to understand it. For her, the act of writing opens up opportunities for re-invention to occur, allowing a new perspective, creating a new purpose and new meaning for her life. Without this form of self-expressions, hooks notes her lonely, painful, and dark her childhood was:

Loneliness brings me to the edge of what I know. My soul is dark like the inner world of the cave—bone black. Like quicksand it sucks me in and keeps me there in the space of all my pain. I never say out loud that I could die in this space of loneliness, of outsidersness. I never say out loud that I want to kill myself—to go away from all this. I never tell anyone how much I want to belong (181).

hooks’s tone is depressive, but this ‘world’ and ‘all [its] pain’ is her known existence. However, she found her place with the act of expressing herself. She states, “In my journal I write—I belong in this place of words. This is my home. This dark, bone black inner cave where I am *making* a world for myself” (hooks 183). Thus, hooks’s act of ‘storying’ reinvents her life, validating that her world is not all pain—and she (re)wrote her world, her self, her story.

However, hooks is aware that her story does not exist in isolation. Rather, it is connected to her history, a culture that precedes her. In her foreword, hooks expresses that with her writing process, she sought “to conjure a rich magical world of southern black culture that was sometimes paradisiacal and at other times terrifying” (xi). In addition to connecting her self to her culture, hooks overtly links herself with the importance of the act of storytelling, stating that

it has been a part of hooks's life as a means to connect with others—be it her ancestors, her current communities, and/or her predecessors. After explaining that her mother's mother was a storyteller and an interpreter of dreams, hooks writes that her grandmother “tells [her] stories [of Africa] over and over so [hooks] will know them, so [she] will pass them on” (3, 50). Thus, hooks's story—no matter what version, what experience—is always somehow connected to both her past and future. In other words, an author and community are perpetually linked. And when we write ourselves, we are writing history and have the potential to yield positive changes for the future. Furthermore, by writing the ‘I,’ we are essentially writing the ‘we’—as Maya Angelou claims.¹²⁶

Again, I stress that individuals do not exist in isolation. Thus, “[t]he beauty [of hooks's story may lie] in the way it all comes together exposing and revealing *the inner life of a girl inventing herself*—creating the foundation of selfhood and identity that will ultimately lead to the fulfillment of her true destiny—*becoming a writer*” (xi, my emphasis). However, the act of reinventing herself as a writer post-trauma is a story that involves others. Such a statement is not meant to dismiss the individual and her story. Rather, I stress this to highlight that when individual stories exist, we, as a society, benefit from each because every life story, trauma stories included, is essentially a story that involves more than the individual.

It involves you.

It involves me.

Yes, it is personal. And it is individually creative.

But it is simultaneously mine and yours. It is ours.

And it should be told.

¹²⁶ DeSalvo writes, “Maya Angelou has said, through writing ‘I’ becomes ‘we’” (209). Such claims are in line with a feminist stance, asserting that ‘the personal is the universal.’

Recovering with Sustained Relationships

The story of trauma should be told for the individual who experienced the trauma *as well as* for the community. As Tal writes, “Literature of trauma is written from the need to tell and retell the story of the traumatic experience, to make it ‘real’ both to the victim and to the community. Such writing serves both as validation and cathartic vehicle for the traumatized author” (21). And I assert that such writing serves as communal efforts of establishing and maintaining relationships that are needed for healing to occur.

To reiterate, Herman notes that the second stage of recovery is telling the story and making meaning out of what occurred: “In the second stage of recovery, the survivor tells the story of the trauma. She tells it completely, in depth and in detail. This work of reconstruction actually transforms the traumatic memory, so that it can be integrated into the survivor’s life story” (175). Afterwards, Herman asserts that the telling of the story is not enough—a creation of a new ‘self’ must be validated and sustained. She writes, “Having come to terms with the traumatic past, the survivor faces the task of creating a future...now she must develop a new self... the old beliefs that gave meaning to her life have been challenged; now she must find anew a sustaining faith” (Herman 196). Thus, creating new connections to self and others is part of the third stage of recovery.

Such reconnections—with self *and* with others—are part of the validation process as well. And stories aid in developing relationships with family, strangers, readers, listeners. In fact, support groups are common and well-known, and individuals physically and virtually commune with one another to voice their stories to empower each other.¹²⁷ In short, such communities intend to aid in each other’s healing processes while creating new associations and

¹²⁷ Riki Thompson’s article engages with virtual communities (and the rhetoric of these spaces) created for ‘victims’ to connect with one another.

emotional links regarding relationships with others—as trauma damages relationships and individuals’ ability to trust others. As Herman confirms,

Traumatic events destroy the sustaining bonds between individual and community.

Those who have survived learn that their sense of self, of worth, of humanity, depends upon a feeling of connection to others. The solidarity of a group provides the strongest protection...Trauma isolates; the group re-creates a sense of belonging. Trauma shames and stigmatizes; the group bears witness and affirms. Trauma degrades the victim; the group exalts her. Trauma dehumanizes the victim; the group restores her humanity (214).

Thus, relationships create a sense of community that aids the self in re-invention and validating a sense of purpose, empowering those who have experienced traumas and live to tell their tales. In other words, a group *can* restore and lead towards personal development and better awareness of both self and others post-trauma, stressing recognizing and accepting her and her story.

A group witnesses.

And a group can also ‘bear witness’ of the account, further sharing the story.

The Problem of “Bearing Witness”

According to Judith Harris, confessional stories give writers “a reason to speak, agency,” but they also “challenge the reader to meet the responsibility demanded of him [or her] to bear witness” (22). Receiving stories about trauma through the act of reading may be a form of ‘witnessing’ and may even instigate the ‘bearing witness’ of other stories. Furthermore, the act of witnessing has been identified as being “stressful” and as a “learned art.”¹²⁸ Thus, receiving stories of trauma is challenging and entails levels of responsibility.

¹²⁸ Pennebaker sums this up when he that “listening to others’ traumatic stories is stressful. It is a learned art” (*Opening*, 119).

I mention the difficulty involved to emphasize that there are complications, implications when not only ‘witnessing’ but also ‘bearing witness.’ In this section, I challenge the witnessing and this commonly used phrase of ‘bearing witness,’ examining the implications and contending that the phrase is problematic on several layers. I first examine the phrase itself to argue that it implies more of a monologue, a one-way conversation, neglecting to invite relational interaction. Next, I engage with Tal to confirm that individuals ‘witness’ differently, bringing their own experiences to their interpretations. Finally, I assert that the act of ‘bearing witness’ has been associated with both resistance and violence.

As the concept of ‘bearing witness’ stands now, the two words indirectly stress the trauma that occurred, and the individual, once again, remains stuck in a representation that depends upon the trauma, implying victimization and implying that an act occurred to her *alone* and someone else is only a ‘witness’... and she, and others, should ‘bear’ this trauma.

‘Bear witness.’

A phrase that has found its place in discourses that involve topics of trauma. In fact, the phrase itself has become somewhat of a buzzword, which in part, lessens its very meaning. But the phrase is more problematic than simply being overused. A quick look in the thesaurus demonstrates that this word may be replaced with words such as ‘tolerate,’ ‘put up with,’ ‘stomach.’ Thus, there is a negative connotation, situating the experience as something that is a *burden*, something that may be construed as ‘too much’ to be acknowledged—a connotation that I have argued against when reconceptualizing the meaning of pandoric.

In addition, the word ‘witness’ indicates that all one has to do is ‘witness,’ which may imply passive listening. One can ‘witness’ as an innocent bystander, acting and feeling as neither part of the problem nor part of the solution. Such a connotation is problematic if cultural

change is ever to occur. And the first step towards change is recognizing that ‘bearing witness’ and ‘witnessing’ a story of trauma involve an overt effort to acknowledge that stories and individuals *are* interconnected.

The actual phrasing is not the only problem with ‘bearing witness’ and ‘witnessing’ of ‘trauma narratives.’ Another is the fact that all ‘witnesses’ come to the story with their own experiences, thus, interpreting the story that is shared from different perspectives. In other words, individuals bring their own experiences to the text. And these experiences affect the understanding of the tale that individuals are asked to ‘bear.’ In other words, if someone has experienced a trauma, then the story of someone else’s trauma resonates differently.

Specifically, words and meanings resonate with past experiences, as Kalí Tal asserts:

Words such as *blood*, *terror*, *agony* and *madness* gain new meaning within the context of trauma, and survivors emerge from the traumatic environment with a new set of definitions. On the surface, language appears unchanged—survivors still use the word *terror*, non-traumatized audiences read and understand the word *terror*, and the dislocation of meaning is invisible until one pays attention to the cry of survivors (16).

And as identities are altered with traumatic experiences, so are understanding of words, implications of meaning, the very language that we make and that makes us.

Tal argues that “there are meanings available to survivor-readers that are not available to nontraumatized readers” (16). I cite Tal because she brought to my attention that even the very word ‘trauma’ means something different when someone has experienced a trauma. Meanings and stories of trauma *will* affect people differently, and they will relate, connect to these stories in unique ways—as they have had their own experiences, which play roles in their engagements with the texts.

Another problem of ‘bearing witnessing’ is the fact that there is no way of knowing how one will ‘witness,’ how one will react to or engage with the text. Hélène Cixous points this out in her text titled *Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing* written with Mireille Calle-Gruber,

[Writing] repairs the author. But it does not repair the relationship. The person who writes feels innocent; innocent of writing. What comes back to [her] in the look of the other is not at all that. Something comes back that is not said. Cannot be said. Because it is not clear how the friend, the other, could openly accuse the person who writes of writing (93).

Writers of trauma may ask others to ‘witness’ a story, unsure of what the audience can and will bear, but these writers have no way of knowing how they will be judged, how their writing will be judged. One can only embrace her story, her self, and all of her pandoric entities that are intertwined, and hope for the best when offering her story for others to bear.

‘Bearing witness.’

To her story.

Tal writes, “Bearing witness is an aggressive act. It is born out of a refusal to bow to outside pressure to revise or to repress experience, a decision to embrace conflict rather than conformity, to endure a lifetime of anger and pain rather than to submit to the seductive pull of revision and repression. Its goal is change” (7). But Tal’s ‘change’ and call to ‘bear witness’ is grounded in a “battle” for “power” and to “force a shift in the social and political structure” (7). Such a stance is closely aligned to resistance, as explained in chapter four.

Such a battle is a battle that I am sometimes swayed to enter, buying into this need to ‘resist’ and (re)gain ‘power’ when historically women have been without it, identified as powerless. The claims seem to be solid. Defendable. Thus, I find myself flirting with the idea.

But this is a ‘battle’ that does not foster change, does not promote creation—as this anger and aggression are more destructive, neglecting to stress the *creative*.

Tal even writes, “Once codified, the traumatic experience becomes a weapon in another battle, the struggle for political power” (6). I acknowledge that Tal has reason to align the terms, and she is not alone. Even hooks associates ‘storying’ her trauma with a battle in her memoir. Furthermore, hooks links herself to a warrior when sharing one of her stories, a story about how her grandmother had a dream that she was to become a warrior.¹²⁹ By saying that hooks will ‘fight in wars or battles,’ that hooks will be a ‘warrior,’ her grandmother creates a prophecy that comes true. For hooks, with the help of her stories, has opened up opportunities to use her words as weapons in a larger battle against oppression and violence.

But words like ‘battle’ and ‘warrior’ should not be the only terms used...

For the act of sharing stories and ‘bearing witness’ is more...

For these women who do so are more...

They are healers working towards healing a culture that has been wounded.¹³⁰

And ‘bearing witness’ tends to be a phrase that does not capture the healing aspect, the interconnectedness involved.

A Change to Storycatching

Having disrupted the preconceived notion that ‘bearing witness’ is purely a positive phrase, I offer an alternative in this section—one that better captures the layers and complexities of ‘trauma narratives,’ one that is more appropriate and implicative of healing processes and

¹²⁹ In *bone black*, hooks writes, “[My grandmother] says that this is the face of my destiny, that I am to be a warrior. I do not understand. I do not intend to fight in wars or battles. She says that there are many battlegrounds in life, that I will live the truth of the dream in time” (51).

¹³⁰ In the text *Healing Narratives: Women Writers Curing Cultural Dis-ease*, author Gay Wilentz dedicates a section in her introduction on “Women as Healers” (11-15). An important significance in her section connects women healers with a larger cause: “The holistic notion in women’s healing that one cannot be well without a relationship to the spiritual self, family, and community resonates with the cultural dimension of healing” (13).

interconnectedness. Drawing from Christina Baldwin, I propose that individuals should engage in the ‘art of storycatching’ as opposed to ‘bearing witness.’ Such an alteration highlights the two-way interaction involved, a change of perspective, and an interconnectedness based on both hope and love.

Baldwin, who received her M.A. in Educational Psychology, studied journal writing and its benefits and argues that stories yield new understandings (Back Cover). She writes, “We are bringing metaphors of story into the raw experience of our lives and making new sense and meaning” (Baldwin 40). In her text, Baldwin stresses the importance of story and explains what she labels as ‘the art of storycatching.’ As Baldwin writes, “The *art of storycatching* focuses our abilities *to heal ourselves and change the world* around us through the *stories we share*” (32, my emphasis).

With the concept of ‘storycatching,’ witnesses take on an active role, implying a co-committed relationship and two-way interaction when stories are shared. Thus, rather than being innocent bystanders who ‘bear witness’ to pains that seem ‘too much,’ individuals become a part of the processes, processes that stress the individual and relational roles involved with ‘storying,’ processes that embrace the pandoric, processes that encompass a feminine poetics.

Such processes focus simultaneously on the individual voice, the individual story while creating communal connections to a larger story. As literary scholar Henke asserts, “Women daring to name themselves, to articulate their personal histories on diary, memoir, and fictional form, reinscribe the claims of feminine desire onto the texts of a traditionally patriarchal culture. In doing so, they begin to celebrate a semiotic discourse and a maternal subculture that has always generated experimental modes of feminine self-invention” (xvi). Thus, individual stories by women aid in the larger story of *women* as a ‘subculture.’ However, I caution against only

equating this claim with overt gendering juxtapositions of resistance; rather, I contend that a ‘feminine desire’ must include creation and creativity and a ‘semiotic discourse’ may focus on the flow and the processes involved.

Furthermore, the emphasis on the communal and the stress that no one woman exists without relational interactions do not diminish the importance of the individual story. Thus, individuals do link to individuals, and ‘her’ experiences are a part of my own—as each story is connected to a larger, collective one. One that simultaneously stresses the importance of one’s personal story, one’s individual story. As emphasized by Deborah M. Horvitz in *Literary Trauma: Sadism, Memory, and Sexual Violence in American Women’s Fiction*, “To comprehend the magnitude of trauma, it is necessary to focus on the individualized nuances and textures of each victim’s narrative” (5). Despite Horvitz’s placing her emphasis on the idea that these women are static in the role of the ‘victim’—something that is at odds with my stance—I concur with the notion that each voice is important. In other words, *each* story may be different, as each story is reflective of the author’s situation, position, experience. *But* each story assists in better understanding the larger story, the ‘magnitude of trauma’ as Horvitz puts it.

Such involvement with ‘individual’ stories of ‘trauma’ requires a ‘shift in [our] perspective.’ As Mark Doty writes, “What is healing, but a shift in perspective?” (qtd in DeSalvo 3). And it is time to shift our perspective.

Individually.

Collectively.

Doing so will allow women’s stories to be heard from a perspective that better understands a life that has passed and a life *we* wish to create. Doing so will better alter the genre of ‘trauma narrative’ to a more appropriate term. Doing so will re-write this genre as

healing narratives that encourage and empower—as stories are interconnected, encompassing person, process, and purpose.¹³¹

Thus, such a shift has the possibility to work towards both self- and social-awareness while simultaneously emphasizing positive change and creative development for all involved linking each other, despite race, class, gender, culture. Such does have conflict and pain. But such a shift focuses on transformative processes based on compassion, well-being, and trust. Such is an affective undertaking that has the potential to foster both hope and love. A hope and love that is often hidden behind ‘power’ and ‘resistance’ when we insist on ‘bearing witness.’

And this ‘shift in perspective’ better involves others as active participants within storytelling processes, as ‘storycatchers.’

Thus, we, as a society that is both part of the problem and part of the solution, should focus on the healing aspects of the stories we ‘catch’ and the stories we share. All the while, recognizing that *healing* transcends the individual, that healing leads to social awareness.

Only then will stories be more than ‘trauma narratives.’

Only then will authors be more than victims, more than survivors of trauma.

Only then will these stories and their authors be more than their wounds and words.

Such a ‘shift in [our] perspective’ renames texts as *healing narratives* and the women who have experienced traumas as *healers*. More specifically, these women become what I label “wounded healers.”¹³²

¹³¹ DeSalvo also outlines the “qualities of a healing narrative”: “A healing narrative renders our experience concretely, authentically, explicitly, and with a richness of details”; “A healing narrative links feelings to events”; “A healing narrative is a balanced narrative. It uses negative words to describe emotions and feelings in moderation; but uses positive words, too”; “A healing narrative reveals the insights we’ve achieved from our painful experiences”; “A healing narrative tells a complete, complex story” (*Writing*, 57-61). I mention DeSalvo’s points to acknowledge her emphasis on healing as well as to acknowledge our convergences. However, she and I are not in complete agreement, as my dissertation implies; our divergence lies mainly in the idea of ‘a complete’ story.

¹³² This phrase is borrowed from Nouwen and will be explained in depth in the following chapter.

Healing with More than Language

These women share their stories of trauma in order to engage in healing processes, theirs and others'; however, I contend that their stories must draw from more than language in order to work towards healing. In this section, I reiterate the idea that traumatic memories may themselves be beyond linear language, and thus, stories may exist in a feminine poetics that encompasses the process of writing. After which, I offer a case analysis of Louise DeSalvo's memoir in order to stress the lack of language and to argue that healing is an act that requires more than language and involves 'storycatching' one's own stories and recognizing the interconnectedness with others.

To state that healing requires more than language sounds ideal as traumatic memories may be represented by more than linear language—as explained in previous chapters. To reiterate briefly, Herman affirms, "Traumatic memory...is wordless and static" (175). She continues, "[T]rauma story in its untransformed state [has been labeled] as a 'prenarrative'" (Herman 175). Such concepts emphasize that traumatic memories may be frozen—unable to be represented completely. Thus, critics often recognize that there is a lack of language when it comes to trauma. However, critics are often quick to stress that it is the language *alone* that leads to healing. I turn to literary scholar Leigh Gilmore to explain this dyad:

Something of a consensus has already developed that takes trauma as the unrepresentable to assert that trauma is beyond language in some crucial way, that language fails in the face of the trauma, and that trauma mocks language and confronts it with insufficiency. Yet, at the same time language about trauma is theorized as an impossibility, language is pressed forward as *that which can heal the survivor of the trauma* (6, my emphasis).

I concur that language assists in the healing process. But it is not the only factor involved.

Analyzing Louise DeSalvo's *Vertigo: A Memoir*, I stress the lack of language, the need to engage in 'storycatching' one's own stories, and the benefit of recognizing that one's story is interconnected with a larger one. Furthermore, I assert that healing involves more than assigning language to traumatic memories; it involves existing and moving with the process.

DeSalvo, like Fraser and Azaldúa, expresses that she did not have the language needed to narrate her traumatic memories; thus, the story, for so long, remained untold. I cite DeSalvo at length because of the richness of the passage:

The story I never told my parents, couldn't tell my parents, *because I did not remember what happened, or didn't have the language to describe what happened, or because there isn't a language to describe what happened, or because I was too angry or stunned or blunted to describe what happened*, came back to me in bits and pieces, in scraps and fragments throughout my life. A moment here, a moment there, disconnected in time, removed from place. Jump cuts of memory without cause and effect, event and consequence, incident and emotion. A place that language can't describe, but a place that my body remembered (*Vertigo*, 102, my emphasis).

Stunned without language for her past, DeSalvo experiences flashbacks from a time that was too painful to hold in her memory. 'A moment here, a moment there, disconnected in time' reveal themselves in fragmentations, without complete meaning, and intersecting her present with her past, shattering linearity.

DeSalvo even implies that the trauma has affected her self-development—and the language associated with this development—by claiming that when she attempts to speak, her language ends up being "a cross between the language of a child and the language of a woman" (*Vertigo*, 102). Furthermore, she expresses that she is not ready to convey what occurred and

how she had felt: “I can’t do that yet” (*Vertigo*, 103). Unlike Fraser, who stylistically builds upon her ‘inexpressible,’ eventually expressing it, DeSalvo never offers *this* story. She ‘can’t do that yet.’ Instead, the reader is forced to assume, to read between the lines.

Such an inability to disclose one traumatic memory within a text that engages with other forms of trauma exemplifies the fact that healing exists on a continuum and obtaining the courage to confront the past pain, to open and expose that memory takes time.

DeSalvo’s text is not about this particular trauma that surfaces via this flashback, bringing her back to a time when she was “nine or ten or six or five or four” (*Vertigo*, 102). This trauma is but a snippet of the text. Rather, the book recounts her life in relation to her sister’s suicide, her own anxiety and depression that developed as a result of this traumatic experience, and her mother’s death.¹³³ But embedded within these experiences and expressed emotions is this one trauma that she cannot yet ‘bear.’ Two pages of a text she labels a “lunatic version” of what occurred (*Vertigo*, 103-105). Reading these pages, one is able to assume that DeSalvo experienced some sort of (sexual) abuse while away one summer, but she offers no definitive textual statements. And in a way, this ‘lunatic version,’ which remains beyond language, seems to be closer to the trauma itself, not yet ready to be labeled, to be ‘fixed’ with text.

I mention DeSalvo and her text in part to demonstrate that some events take time to confront, to remember, and to re-member—as doing so brings suppressed thoughts and feelings to the forefront. To stress, DeSalvo may not remember exactly, but more so, she may not yet want to re-member the event—thus, she cannot yet, or will not, assign language to what

¹³³ There is a substantial narrative distance between when the events occurred and when they are ‘told.’ Like Fraser, DeSalvo draws immediate attention to the fact that her story is about her trauma. Quickly and bluntly with her first sentence: “It is a little more than a month after my sister’s suicide in January 1984” (DeSalvo 1). The date conflicts with the publication date, so it can be assumed that her textual ‘present’ is a reconstruction of the past, and it is possibly an old journal entry, as DeSalvo does note that she journals. Secondly, her text jumps from 1984 to 1980 to 1956 to 1993 to 1983 to 1975, etc., disrupting linearity and coinciding with how trauma itself ruptures the temporal (1, 3, 5, 13, 15, 219).

occurred, possibly because she cannot yet fully admit that this did occur.¹³⁴ As Pennebaker notes, “Some issues are so painful that we deceive ourselves into thinking that they don’t exist” (*Opening*, 7). However, I mention this section of her text to insist that DeSalvo experiences therapeutic benefits by writing her ‘lunatic version’ of her trauma—even if the complete, fixed story is not exposed. Rather, as readers, we should engage with the version that is shared, storycatching it for what it is, accepting its incompleteness and being present with it.

I return to McNiff, who explains that the creator should be present with the pain and all its pandoric qualities without attempting to ‘fix it’; however, I transfer this concept to the ‘storycatcher.’ As a receiver of one’s story, we should receive stories of trauma in a way that allows us ‘to be present with it, understand it, rather than attempting to fix it.’ There is no need to ‘fix’ the teller or the tale, merely accept them. Be with them. Even when they are overflowing with multiple, feminine, ambiguous styles. For these styles are at least creative, creating something anew on her spiral of healing.

Such is DeSalvo’s ‘lunatic version.’ Full of that which is more than language. Full of intermodal expressions. Sensory associations. Images. Sounds. Textures. Creating a flow with ‘many things’ and sustaining movement between trauma and language with the *act* of creating, the *act* of writing.

My choice to engage with DeSalvo rests heavily on the fact that DeSalvo is aware of the therapeutic benefits of her writing—even if she stresses the role of language. In fact, DeSalvo’s critical text *Writing as a Way of Healing* emphasizes that writing heals—a little too clear-cut and

¹³⁴ This idea of textually depicting the trauma is in line with the notion that ‘trauma narratives’ are published later in one’s life. DeSalvo does not publish until the age of 53, which was about sixteen years after her sister’s suicide and many more after her childhood abuse. I should also note that Allison (b. 1949) first published her story at the age of 43 (*Bastard Out of Carolina* in 1992, *Skin* in 1994, and *Two or Three Things...* in 1995). And Fraser (b. 1935) published her first account around the age of 37 (*Pandora* in 1972), waiting about fifteen years to write *My Father’s House* (1988).

finite. However, the same text implies that healing does involve more than language. DeSalvo writes, “[W]e don’t write simply to produce this piece. We write to engage in the process of writing” (81). This process is what I want to stress—noting that healing involves movement, healing encompasses creation. Repeatedly. Again and again.

Healing processes, like writing processes themselves, are never truly complete.

Furthermore, healing involves others.

DeSalvo closes her memoir, explaining that she cannot part with some of her departed mother’s and sister’s kitchen items. The significance is that DeSalvo exclaims that her healing is linked to recognizing that her story links to her mother’s and her sister’s and that she, her mother, and her sister are all interconnected—separate, but linked. Her last sentence points this out as an analogy: “The most trivial, yet the most important personal effects of the women in my family, come together at last, and mingle in my kitchen drawers and cupboards” (*Vertigo*, 263). Thus, DeSalvo learns to live with her pain, to be present with her trauma, and to use it in ways that are advantageous.

Such ideas about interconnectedness are highlighted in the final words of her critical text, overtly declaring that healing is a communal effort:

[Authors] write about what they have lived through—to heal themselves. But they also write to help heal a culture... Writing testimony, to be sure, means that we tell our stories. But it also means that we no longer allow ourselves to be silenced... Writing to heal, then, and making that writing public, as [she] sees it, is the most important emotional, psychological, artistic, and political project of our time” (*Writing*, 216).

Thus, processes of healing involves more than assigning words to a narrative.

It involves creating something anew... And it rests upon hope and love.

Healing with Hope and Love

Author Audre Lorde states,

I write...for myself and my children and for as many people as possible who can read me, who need to hear what I have to say – who need to use what I know...I write for these women for whom a voice has not yet existed, or whose voices have been silenced.

I don't have the only voice or all of their voices, but they are a part of my voice, and I am a part of theirs (qtd in Tal 21).

Such writing serves as an example of how one individual voice is interconnected with others, representing voices that existed prior and voices that have yet to exist. Furthermore, such words stress that writing acts are linked with a healing that reaches beyond individual healing because of the interconnectedness. Drawing from Lorde's quote, I assert that healing, individual and communal, occur when hope and love are at its core. For self. For others. For healing and creating anew. In this section, I contend that the presence of both love and hope yield forms of creative expression that are not ruled by power relationships and resistance. To do so, I engage with Jung and Maya Angelou.

Jung states, "Where love rules, there is no will to power, and where power predominates, love is lacking. The one is the shadow of the other."¹³⁵ Thus, when speaking about trauma and healing post-trauma, it is vital to stress the presence of love, instead of highlighting resistance to power structures and creating associations that continue to enforce power dyads. As bell hooks confirms, "Jung's insight, that if the will to power is paramount love will be lacking, is important to remember" (*love*, 98).¹³⁶ The choice to love, both self and others, is conscious—and connects to a choice to hold onto a hope for betterment.

¹³⁵ This citation does not have a source; rather, it is a famous quote.

¹³⁶ hooks's *all about love: new visions* is shortened to *love*.

A hope that should remain when all else is lost... like in Pandora's story.

I recognize that healing with love and hope moves the focus off of resistance.

Furthermore, such refuses to relegate healing as a form of regaining power after being powerless due to the traumatic experience, due to being wounded into positions of silence. Rather, healing with love and hope stresses the act of empowering self and others, and acts of creative expression encompasses love, hope, and empowerment, allowing transformation to occur with every story written, no matter the version, no matter the medium.

On February 12, 2009, Maya Angelou spoke as a part of a lecture series at the New Orleans Arena. During her talk, Angelou acknowledged the positioning of power and trauma and how these entities affected her voice, her story. After explaining her childhood rape, Angelou declared that she did not speak of this event. In fact, she did not speak at all. She had literally been traumatized into silence.¹³⁷

Angelou shared that she found healing with and through poetry, reading and eventually performing, writing, and sharing it. She said, "Thanks to poetry, I came back to my voice. Thanks to poetry, I became free from some of my ignorance."¹³⁸ She continued to explain that her perspective changed and that she soon realized that her trauma had not overpowered her voice. And I would argue that her trauma did not overpower her 'self.' Angelou gracefully declared, "I left my voice—my voice hadn't left me." I mention Angelou's words during this lecture to return to ideas explained in the second chapter, regarding the notion that trauma seemingly holds the power, overpowering the 'self' and resulting in an image of one being 'traumatized.' Such a notion should be transgressed; such a notion should be altered. Women may temporarily feel powerless—but recognizing that both love and hope are present in today

¹³⁷ This information unfolded during Maya Angelou's lecture with "UNO Horizons: Speakers Helping Us See Tomorrow Today" series at the University of New Orleans Lakefront Arena.

¹³⁸ Citations from her lecture are as exact as I could hear/transcribe.

and in tomorrow better enable women to realize that they are in control, that they can voice their creative expressions, and that they should share their stories of trauma because these stories are *healing narratives* full of love and hope to empower both self and others...

Angelou maintained her subjectivity and ultimately decided to share her stories. Focusing on her choice to speak, to write, to share. All in attempts to engage with healing, a healing that is based on hope and love. A healing that does not attempt to (re)assert 'power' over a time when she was 'powerless.' Rather, a healing that acknowledges she is capable of more. She is capable of healing her self—and of encouraging, empowering, loving, healing others.

She is capable of being and encouraging others to be “a rainbow in the cloud.” This message was what she gave to her audience at the Arena. This same advice can be found in her text titled *Letter to My Daughter*, where Angelou writes the following: “You may not control all the events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them. Try to be a rainbow in someone’s cloud...Make every effort to change the things you do not like. If you cannot change, change the way you have been thinking. You might find a new solution” (xii).

These words exemplify shifting perspectives, focusing on love and hope and healing.

These words exemplify that writing and sharing stories of trauma yield wounded healers.

Angelou does not allow her past trauma to consume her,

nor does she decide to focus on these wounds.

Rather, she has made efforts to promote healing.

Efforts that are grounded upon hope and love.

For self.

For others.

For the world.

This is effective. This is creative. This is transformative.

Only when we accept this can we truly transform our perspectives of she who writes her trauma.

Only when we accept this will her stories become healing narratives.

And only when we accept this will she become a wounded healer.

Sark writes, “Every woman is living a journey of her own life. We are each teachers and healers, and our voices count” (120). And each voice is part of another’s voice and a larger story. And when these voices focus on healing with and through hope and love, both self-awareness and cultural transformations are strengthened through accepting and empowering individuals as growing, developing selves committed to continual processes of healing...

According to Baldwin, story creates “*connected action [which] becomes a force for restoring/restorying the world*” (67). And in order to ‘[restore/restory] the world,’ we, as a society and especially literary and feminist scholars, have to begin telling a new story, one of healing...

This is the story that I wish to tell...

This is the story that I wish would “circulate.”¹³⁹

To reiterate while spiraling back to the words that began this story, this dissertation, I return to Trinh: “The story never really begins nor ends, even though there is a beginning and an end to every story, just as there is a beginning and end to every teller...[but] [I]et me tell you a story. For all I have is a story...” (1, 119).

¹³⁹ Trinh Minh-ha writes, “A story told is a story bound to circulate” (134).

7 HEALING (NARRATIVES) IN THE CLASSROOM: WRITING IN A “WOUNDED HEALER” PEDAGOGY

Stories invite us to come to know the world and our place in it.
- Witherell and Noddings (qtd in Nye 391)

*Writers must trust that readers are ready to receive
our words—to grapple with the strange and unfamiliar
or to know again what is already known in new ways.*
- hooks (remembered, 152)

Throughout this project, I have problematized women’s writing and trauma stories within literary and feminist fields. I have done so in order to reconceptualize women authors and their texts, respectively, as wounded healers and healing narratives. In this chapter, I turn to pedagogical studies to assert that by teaching these women as generative and creative *wounded healers* and by stressing the process, purpose, and person, classrooms refuse to dismiss these women as solely wounded. Furthermore, I contend that an incorporation of healing narratives by women writers within English curricula enables classrooms to engage with links of trauma, writing, and healing while enhancing participants’ social awareness (of a shared story)—fostering interconnectedness and transformation.¹⁴⁰ Thus, this chapter brings my dissertation’s literary, feminist, and pedagogy threads together developing what I call a *wounded healer pedagogy*. This pedagogy directly refers to Henri J. M. Nouwen’s spiritual and philosophical claims, linking the personal, creative, and spiritual.

Such a conclusion synthesizes the claims throughout this dissertation, contributing to comparative literature by shifting the way these texts and women are read and taught, bringing these personal traumas into public spheres, and acknowledging the healing possibilities of creative expression. In addition, this conclusion contributes to the field of composition studies

¹⁴⁰ Specifically, I contend that creating a special topics literary course around this theme yields benefits, better linking trauma, writing, and healing. However, I note that specifying a particular upper-level course is not meant to minimize the benefits of incorporating the personal aspect in entry level courses such as Freshmen composition—as I support the inclusion of the personal in this course—but acknowledge that this is a different topic and framework.

by linking personal writing with a spiritual component in order to highlight that links among trauma, writing, and healing can, and should, be made *and* to stress a pedagogy that is grounded upon hope, love, and compassion. Ultimately, this chapter promotes well-being of mind, body, and spirit as well as relational and cultural interconnectedness—through a pedagogy I call a “wounded healer” pedagogy, which fosters learning, self-actualization, and social consciousness through *creating* ‘for the sake of creating’ *and* for the sake of healing.

In this chapter, I establish what I mean by wounded healer pedagogy by referring to pedagogical theorists, namely bell hooks and Mary Rose O’Reilly, who both use affective teaching and focus on the spirit. Influenced by their theories and drawing on Nouwen, I assert that the authors are not the sole healers; rather, *all participants* in classrooms are healers, or more specifically, wounded healers. Authors of texts. Teachers. *And* students. These assertions rely on situating this pedagogy in what is known as a “third space” in curriculum studies. Such a “third space” can be conveyed easier when acknowledging that my claims do intersect trauma and healing with personal writing in classrooms, and intersections among these terms are commonly viewed as a ‘problem’ for composition scholars and writing programs.

Thus, in this chapter, I must first outline some of the ‘problems’ of personal writing within the confines of the institution by situating my research within composition studies. I do so by briefly explaining the composition movement of expressivism, while challenging its limitations and primarily engaging with composition theorists such as Peter Elbow. I, then, highlight complications involved when students personally disclose information and when scholars, such as Jeffrey Berman, associate students’ writing with the “writing cure.” Ultimately, in the first sections of the chapter, I stress the tensions of such a topic while establishing the building blocks to challenge these implications. I do so in order to argue that

creating, expressing through personal stories and overtly linking trauma, writing, and healing do not have to be problematic. Rather, they may be pandoric, embracing the multiple, ambiguous, and unknowns. After highlighting such, I am then able to contend that the pandoric and links among trauma, writing, and healing become catalysts for healing, for learning anew within a *wounded healer pedagogy*. I close the chapter by explaining this pedagogy, drawing on Nouwen to link the personal, creative, and spiritual in classrooms and to stress the creation of healing communities. Such incorporations of wounded healers and their stories yield opportunities for positive transformations to emerge within and beyond English classrooms.

The Problem of Writing with Wounded Healers

Before explaining further what I mean by a wounded healer pedagogy, I first engage with what I view to be one of the main problems involved when advocating for students to engage with texts by women who write their traumas, or rather, by these “wounded healers.” To clarify, I assert that when writing in English courses within such a context, there is the implication that these selected texts may invite students’ personal stories, and sometimes even their wounds, to surface through assignments and/or discussions—whether facilitated by instructors or interpreted by students—and such results in complex issues. Thus, in this section, I engage with some of the problems that unfold when students’ personal writings are associated with trauma, writing, and healing in order to explain some of existing tensions that is bound to surface with my stance.

To outline the main problems affiliated with expressing the self in academic writing in the context of trauma and healing, I turn to three sub-sections: the composition movement of expressivism, the fear of engaging with unknown topics and outcomes, and the role of therapy in the classroom, which includes what has been labeled the “writing cure.” By engaging with each topic separately, I essentially build blocks to argue that linking personal writing with trauma and

healing should not be viewed as problematic. After all, “[e]very pair of eyes facing [the teacher] may have endured something [the teacher] could not bear” (as Lucille Clifton says).¹⁴¹ And it is precisely for these reasons that we *should* bring wounded healers and healing narratives into classrooms, opening up opportunities for healing, for creating, for learning anew.

Fixing the ‘Self’ in Expressivism

The movement of expressivism is said to have peaked around the sixties or seventies and is commonly associated with compositionist scholars such as Peter Elbow, Kenneth Macrorie, and Donald Murray (Berlin 146, 151; Elbow 15). Furthermore, I recognize this “school” of thought or composition “movement” to be affiliated with extreme opinions, either supporting its efforts or arguing against them. While this sub-section presents an overview of the concept of expressivism within composition discourse, I also outline this concept to disrupt a monolithic understanding, asserting that this concept does not have to remain fixed.

According to James A. Berlin, “For the expressionist, truth is always discovered within, through an internal glimpse, an examination of their private inner world. In this view the material world is only lifeless matter. The social world is even more suspect because it attempts to coerce individuals into engaging thoughtless conformity” (145). In other words, it is claimed that expressivism “denies the place of intersubjective, social processes in shaping reality” (Berlin 146). To elaborate, it is also said that expressivism is grounded upon the notion that “Truth is conceived as a result of private vision” (Berlin qtd in Elbow 14).¹⁴² These words highlight a major problem for those who do not embrace this thought.

¹⁴¹ Qtd in Anderson and MacCurdy’s edited collection (247). It is noted that this was stated during the keynote at the Association for Poetry Therapy National Conference (1996).

¹⁴² In this unpublished piece, “Exploring Problems with ‘Personal Writing’ and ‘Expressivism,’” Elbow notes he did not consider himself, or the other scholars, in a sort of ‘school’ or ‘movement’ (14-15). Furthermore, exploring expressivism and its historical complexities in depth is out of this project’s scope.

Furthermore, these words are even problematic for those who are most closely associated with the idea. Specifically, Peter Elbow, the pioneer expressivist, views such a negative opinion as a “misreading” (15). In addition, in her text titled *I-Writing: The Politics and Practice of Teach First-Person Writing*, Karen Paley cites Elbow as not even liking the term ‘expressivism.’ Elbow writes, “I hate the term expressivism. It tends to be used by only people who think it’s a bad thing. And [it] tends to connote that I (or expressivists) are more interested in writing about the self or expressing the self than writing that is trying to be accurate or valid about things outside the self” (qtd in Paley 10). Analyzing his early works, Elbow explains that he promotes “thinking” in and with “*all kinds* of writing, even very nonpersonal kinds” although he views “personal writing...[as] the most powerful tools for getting authority over writing and thinking” (16, his emphasis).

Thus, there are theoretical complications embedded within the concept, a concept that is sometimes dismissed because of its focus of the personal, the private.¹⁴³ I pause to ask the following: Is all personal writing forms of expressivism, and vice versa? Can one advocate for students to express the self, the personal without being labeled an expressivist?

I ask these questions to highlight not only the complex issues of this movement but also to return to the idea of the self. Thus, I reiterate my notion that a complete, coherent self is impossible and turn to Lester Faigley, author of *Fragments of Rationality: Postmodernity and the Subject of Composition*. Faigley claims that personal writing is a genre that promotes “the existence of the rational, coherent self and the ability of the self to have privileged insight into its own process” (qtd in Paley 27). However, such claims hold little, if any, weight when viewing

¹⁴³ Paley notes the “Bartholomae-Elbow debate,” claiming that the divide “has been reduced to the social versus the private” (17, 16). She further interrogates James Berlin and his biased representation of ‘expressionism’ in a section she titles “The Berlin Wall” in attempts to debunk his claims that “‘expressionism’ is almost always associated with notions of encouraging the student to develop his or her own ‘unique self’ in writing, writing that avoids and even disdains connection with the material world” (21).

personal writing within a context where a ‘rational, coherent self’ is impossible, especially when trauma is involved. Thus, does expressivism rest on the notion of a ‘coherent self’ and the illusion of ‘privileged insight’? Some critics, indeed, may claim so, while others may contend that self expression is a vehicle to ‘getting authority over writing and thinking’—not necessarily a move that requires, or even that yields, a coherent self.

I highlight these divides to bring discrepancies to the forefront before explaining that some critics have been known to try to work through such distinctions within the context of personal writing. In fact, in an article published in 2001 titled “Revealing Silence: Rethinking Personal Writing,” the author, Anne R. Gere, engages with similar distinctions and argues that silence could be a means “to *reconcile* conflicting conceptions of personal writing—the expressivist, psychoanalytical, and social” (208, my emphasis).¹⁴⁴ By noting that the ‘expressivist, psychoanalytical, and social’ are distinct and in need of being ‘reconcile[d],’ Gere highlights that these concepts *are* viewed separately. However, instead of attempting to ‘reconcile’ them and trying to ‘fix’ these notions, I assert that by transcending a need to ‘fix’ expressivism as a concept, scholars will move beyond associating expressivism with a monolithic, static concept, better viewing the possibility of multiple and hybrid forms to exist.

To elaborate, can an expressivist not be a social constructivist? Or a postmodernist? A psychoanalytic scholar? Where is the line, the distinction? And must concepts and scholars be pigeonholed into one label, one box? This is something with which I have struggled throughout my scholarship. Am I an expressivist, a social constructivist, a feminist, a postmodernist, a psychoanalytical scholar? I contend that I do not have to ‘fix’ my ‘self’—as doing so is ineffective. Thus, such tensions and monolithic labels hinder the acknowledgement of the

¹⁴⁴ Marginal notes by Irvin Peckham indicate these distinctions do not have to be ‘reconciled’ as they are *different* genres. Explaining Gere’s article in its entirety is out this project’s scope.

possibilities associated with incorporating personal writing, and thus, links among trauma, healing, and personal stories.

I pause to acknowledge that even divides among these distinct labels become muddled within current scholarship, as there are always elements of blurring that will take place. Such an idea is implied by Mark Bracher in his text *The Writing Cure: Psychoanalysis, Composition, and the Aims of Education*, where he does create categorical distinctions among these “models of subjectivity” within composition (19-25).¹⁴⁵ However, Bracher notes the similarities among the models when claiming that expressionists did engage with “a subject divided” linking two expressive compositionists, James Moffett and Donald Murray, to psychoanalytic thought (23). Furthermore, he concludes his section, somewhat mocking a clear-cut progression of ‘the subject’ by stating the following: “Thus, while the expressionist model of the divided subject constitutes an important corrective to the modernist and postmodernist models, it, in turn is subject to correction by them” (23).

Thus, one of the main problems, which can be easily fixed, is this idea that concepts—even theoretical movements—are *fixed*, static in time. And with the progression of time, of theory, ideas and concepts move. And so has ideas regarding incorporating the personal into academic settings, but there is still room for progress.

The Personal as Unknown, as Problematic

Another problem associated with self expression in classrooms within the context of trauma and healing is the idea that the unknown is problematic. Specifically, this sub-section explains that there is no way of knowing *what* students will expose and that guidelines of how to

¹⁴⁵ I note that Bracher explains his view in the difference between expressivism and psychoanalytic approaches: “What is lacking [in expressivism] is a clear notion of the writer as a conflicted subject and of the consequence of this conflict for both the writing process and the writer” (159).

respond to situations are seldom, if ever, all-inclusive. Such unknowns often yield uncomfortable feelings and conflicting opinions.

Darsie Bowden, author of *The Mythology of Voice*, touches on this conflict of the personal. Bowden writes, “[P]ersonal writing has been at the heart of a conflict within writing programs—both at the secondary and postsecondary levels—about the kind of writing students should be learning” (49). This one statement demonstrates how the problem of personal writing expands to questioning what ‘kind of writing’ is *appropriate* and *should* be taught. I pause to ask the following: How ‘academic’ is ‘personal’ writing? How ‘personal’ should students be? How much student disclosure should assignments request? How much emotion, how much expression should teachers allow? And how trained are faculty members to handle issues regarding students’ lives when issues do, and they will, emerge?¹⁴⁶ All of these could be condensed into one question: *How problematic is the personal?*

One needs only to think about the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting, where the perpetrator had shared disturbing pieces in a writing course, to realize that extreme cases involving personal writing do exist and that these are, indeed, very valid points.¹⁴⁷ In addition, such cases make it is easier to understand why some may have problems when others overtly draw links among trauma, writing, and healing. In fact, some teachers view personal writing as so problematic—not knowing what will be disclosed and not knowing how to exactly handle matters—that they

¹⁴⁶ I cite Worsham: “Are writing instructors sufficiently trained to be ‘therapeutic’ listeners who are able to truly bear witness to traumatic experience, and do we have sufficient time, patience, energy, and experience to train students to listen and bear witness to each other in appropriate and productive ways?” (180).

¹⁴⁷ After the 2007 shooting on this college campus, studies revealed that the perpetrator’s creative writing pieces in his course may have been warning signs. For more information, refer to the following article, titled “Virginia Tech Gunman Raised Concerns with Disturbing Writing”: <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,266582,00.html>. I note that other behaviors may be indicative of larger issues at hand; thus, writing is not the only way in which students, or people in general, may attempt to reveal hidden thoughts, emotions.

have considered not incorporating any form of personal narrative in the classroom.¹⁴⁸ This solution was offered by Dan Morgan in his opinion piece titled “Ethical Issues Raised by Students’ Personal Writing.”

However, *he* immediately dismisses it.¹⁴⁹

As do I.

Engaging with “extreme” cases of students’ self-disclosure, where students were raped, abused, and even committed crimes, Morgan acknowledges that there are departmental policies, explaining how teachers should handle matters, but he also explains there are no clear-cut guidelines for every situation that may unfold (319). Thus, teachers may not feel prepared to handle the unknown, and the thought of having to do so is uneasy.

Again, I reiterate that such openness, such unknowns hold a tendency to yield both uncomfortable feelings and negative opinions. More specifically, I assert that the unknown is problematic basically because of fear that coincides.

Blurring Writing with Therapy, Teacher with Therapist

Another problem that arises is the notion that the inclusion of the personal in assignments may alter not only the course objectives but also the role of the teacher. Thus, when scholars and teachers draw links among trauma, writing, and healing, they run the risk of blurring writing with therapy and blurring the role of a teacher with that of a therapist. Furthermore, these links may also bring course objectives into question. I expand upon these implications in this sub-section,

¹⁴⁸ In his opinion piece titled “Ethical Issues Raised by Students’ Personal Writing,” Morgan explains that “a more radical solution, seriously contemplated by one of [his] colleagues [is to] eliminate the personal narrative altogether” (323).

¹⁴⁹ There are two other solutions that he offers, but dismiss as unreasonable. The first, to approve topics and hold individual conferences, but he explains “heavy teaching loads” would not allow this to be effective (322). The other is what he calls the “Ann Landers solution,” where “[students are immediately referred to counseling when s/he] writes about a personal crisis past or present” (323). But he is quick to explain that this, too, proves ineffective.

as they are problematic for composition studies, negatively affecting any emerging healing discourse within this field.

I first turn to Jeremy Bump as an example. In his article titled “Teaching Emotional Literacy,” Bump outlines his correspondence with his administration regarding one of his courses and the incorporation of personal writing—as well as the administration’s disapproval. He writes, “In their view, my goal was not to read literature ‘from a psychoanalytic point of view’ but ‘to perform therapy’ on students” (Bump 324). Despite the article’s claim that there was a misunderstanding of the purpose of the course and his role as a teacher, Bump notes that he “was removed...[and] assigned a large lecture course where [this teaching method] is less practical” (330).

However, Bump is probably not the first to come to mind with this topic. Rather, it would be Jeffrey Berman, who has been advocating for the use of personal writing since the seventies (Harris, “Review,” 672; Bracher 7).¹⁵⁰ In his text titled *Diaries to an English Professor: Pain and Growth in the Classroom*, Berman engages with Freud and Pennebaker to argue for an incorporation of diary writing, clinging onto a “writing cure”—an overt act that positions him as someone who claims that writing is beneficial and cathartic (33-40). But aligning writing with healing is complex, and Berman has been critiqued for doing so. For example, as Laura R. Micciche writes in her review titled, “Writing through Trauma: The Emotional Dimensions of Writing,” Berman and his practices are problematic, largely because “the personal disclosure *drives the course rather than the literature they are studying*” (136, my

¹⁵⁰ Judith Harris’s review (“Review: The Necessity of Mourning: Psychoanalytic Paradigms for Change and Transformation in the Composition Classroom”) is on Alcorn’s *Changing the Subject: Discourse and the Constructions of Desire*, Anderson and MacCurdy’s *Writing and Healing: Toward an Informed Practice*, and Berman’s *Risky Writing*. I note that Bracher explains that Berman discourages teachers from being analysts, pointing out that students perform the analyses (7).

emphasis).¹⁵¹ Thus, for some critics the course objectives hold the danger of morphing into a more self-help mode, altering the classroom experience to a self-help session. *But* Berman claims, “[w]riting cannot be reduced to therapy” (131).

Such conflicts and concerns in the field are demonstrative of some of the problems that exist. And these existing problems further flame the fear of bringing trauma, writing, and healing into classrooms. A fear that may prohibit individuals from incorporating healing narratives. A fear of incorporating writing and verbal dialogues that link to the personal. This *fear* to which I am referring is ultimately the biggest problem behind personal writing, personal stories in the classroom.

Fear of what students may disclose.

Fear of how to grade intimate, personal topics.

Fear of how other students may react.

Fear of everything that is simply ‘too much’ to consider.

And I contend that scholars, teachers, and administrators all too often hold onto this fear, sometimes to the point of avoidance and silence, which merely deepens the ‘problem.’

In/Effective Methods and Claims

Such a fear is not effective, not creative, not transformative. Instead we, as readers, should be “ready to receive [the writers’ words]—to grapple with the strange and unfamiliar or to know again what is already known in new ways” (hooks, *remembered*, 152). This statement is layered—as it applies to having hope that students are ‘ready to receive’ the wounded healers’ stories and that we, as teachers, are ‘ready to receive’ students’ stories if, or rather, when they

¹⁵¹ Micciche is actually reviewing Anderson and MacCurdy’s *Writing and Healing*, which includes Berman’s co-authored article (written by Berman and Schiff, one of his students) article titled “Writing about Suicide” (291-312).

emerge. I pause to note that *ready* may not be the best word; rather, we, as participants, *should* receive, should *catch* these stories.

In this section, I further analyze in/effective methods and claims when engaging with personal stories by students. I do so by first challenging Berman's connections among trauma, writing, and healing and then moving to Daniel Morgan's and Wendy Bishop's claims to assert that silencing the discourse is not the answer. I close this section by highlighting that the personal self is predicated upon others, and their stories; such an affirmation affects how writing and stories are incorporated in classrooms. Thus, by engaging with Berman, Morgan, and Bishop, I challenge methods and claims in order to offer a possible, more effective means of linking trauma, writing, and healing in classrooms.

Berman asserts that he views writing as a form of healing. Such is evident in his description of his methods of teachings. He writes,

I encourage my students to share their experiences with the class, and in doing so, they derive even greater benefits from writing. Hearing other people's stories brings clarity to their own, and they have the ability to interpret experience from multiple points of view. The class as a whole becomes an empathetic audience, with students commenting in their diaries on their classmates' experiences. The resulting dialogic relationship is especially valuable at a time when so many students find themselves lost in a large, impersonal educational system where they have little contact with other students and professors (39-40).

I concur with pieces and fragments of what Berman is saying.

But there is a great deal that is unsettling.

The assumptions.

The implications.

The finites.

How does Berman know that clarity will come to each and every student? How can he be so sure that each student will be an ‘empathetic audience’ member? Furthermore, how can he encourage students to share their stories if they are not ready, if they are not far enough along on their own healing continuum to do so? And how can he assert that these students feel as if they exist in a ‘large, impersonal educational system’?

Although I appreciate Berman’s stance and emphasis on the personal, there are other methods of advocating for an incorporation of the personal voice without so many assumptions. For example, Daniel Morgan, who stands by personal writing despite the tensions, outlines an effective way to intertwine the personal. Noting that he stresses the rhetorical situation overtly to his students, Morgan explains that he “emphasize[s] audience and purpose much more thoroughly than ever before [and he highlights] this aspect of writing early and often, thus driving home to students the need to consider these crucial matters *every* time and evaluate appropriateness with *every* writing task” (322).

Furthermore, noting the growth of personal writing in academic settings, Morgan claims that with personal writing, the role of the teacher has also changed: “[T]he very nature of teaching itself has changed, especially in a field such as composition, where ‘content’ is most often the students’ writing. With all the safeguards possible—legal, ethical, professional—our interactions with students, our responses to their work, have become more personal” (321).

He is correct to assert that his job, as a teacher, *is* personal.

He is even correct to state that “our roles [as teachers] have of necessity become even more time-consuming and challenging” (321).¹⁵² And he is even *more* correct to acknowledge that teaching, at times, *does* blur with counseling (321).

I mention Morgan’s assertion as it is applicable when considering whether or not personal writing alters both the objectives of the course and the role of the teacher. Keeping Morgan’s words in mind, I turn to Wendy Bishop, author of *Teaching Lives: Essays and Stories*. In her chapter titled “Writing Is/And Therapy? Raising Questions about Writing Classrooms and Writing Program Administration,” Bishop explains that ineffective comments, ineffective back-and-forth banters about linking writing and healing do not move the discourse. More specifically, she explains that “saying what we’re not (*not* therapists, *not* counselors, *not* specialists in affect or dysfunction) is not helping us to understand and prepare to be what we are” (Bishop 154). We *are* teachers. And I would even say that we are healers, as are our students.

Bishop continues to explain that writing programs “[do explore] forms of ‘the talking cure’ on multiple levels and from multiple perspectives. [And] [p]erhaps it is time to enlarge [our] training by providing new teachers and administrators with an introduction to psychoanalytic theory and the basics of counseling to support [us] in our work” (154). And Bracher, engaging with Bishop, affirms that “even the most basic understanding [of psychoanalytic theory] will be an important asset to the beginning [writing] teacher” (9). Such a suggestion seems beneficial, but at the same time, overtly linking ‘psychotherapy’ and ‘counseling’ with teaching will have repercussions, as it runs the risk of implying that teaching

¹⁵² To come to this conclusion, Morgan writes, “A teacher’s responsibility always did entail more than content expertise and classroom management, always did include listening, encouraging, mentoring, and even, occasionally, some degree of informal counseling. But we now live in a time when more college students have ‘special needs,’ when we see a much higher proportion of students who have led nontraditional lives, a larger number of what I call ‘broken wing’ students” (321).

now *should* encompass this. Furthermore, added training is not realistic due to today's economy. But excluding this budget hurdle, there is a more significant concern with this 'solution.' Such training may peak confidence levels, providing teachers with false illusions that they *can* handle any situation that may arise, when in actuality, they may not be able to do so.

However, Bishop and Bracher are on the right track.

Instead of implementing departmental training sessions, which is an act that seems to be one-sided, favoring overt links between incorporating personal writing and using classrooms as self-help sessions, where teachers now have a 'basic understanding' of psychotherapy, counseling, and/or psychoanalytic thought, I propose that departments open up spaces, forums where participants can openly speak about trauma, writing, and healing within academic walls, noting both possibilities and limitations. Such spaces would promote explorations of various ways to grapple with the many situations that may arise. And doing so could decrease some of the apprehensions, some of the fear regarding incorporating personal stories and linking topics of trauma, writing, and healing. Such discussions need not be relegated for faculty development and may cross into teacher-student, and even student-student, discussions.¹⁵³ In other words, when discussions around these topics, these issues increase, there is a strong chance of reducing the fear that naturally coincides when knowingly facing unknowns.

Such a reduction in fear works towards increasing comfort-levels in order to incorporate assignments that do draw on the personal voice—as such tasks foster learning and self-actualization. I pause to stress that writing may be therapeutic. Morgan even notes this, engaging with Marilyn Valentino: “[T]he intimate nature of writing itself may serve as both a

¹⁵³ Furthermore, even pausing in class to acknowledge a collective trauma is instrumental. For example, my students thanked me after opening up the class for a five-minute discussion regarding the Virginia Tech shooting, explaining that this was the first class that truly acknowledged it. This is where flexibility and openness come into pedagogical methods. In addition, I had to trust that they were honest by remaining in the classroom—as I did allow students to take a five-minute break outside if they did not care to engage in the dialogue.

stimulus and a catharsis for past experiences” (Valentino qtd in Morgan 321). Valentino continues, “When these feelings are expressed, albeit unsolicited and unforeseen, the teacher cannot avoid or dismiss them. To do so would be negligent” (qtd in Morgan 321). Such is true. However, I expand these claims to stress that it would be more negligent *not* to allow a space for students to have the potential for such experiences, albeit varying in degrees and purposes, to emerge.

Thus, like Berman, I contend that “[writing] promotes both self-mastery and self-healing” (131). Or rather, it has the potential to do so. Keeping this in mind, I assert that teachers should not implement writing tasks dedicated to having students write their deepest secrets, their most traumatic experiences in hopes that students will experience healing benefits from writing. In addition, I do acknowledge that similarities to a ‘writing cure’ and ‘talking cure’ exist, but what unfolds in classrooms do not mirror these practices. Rather, objective-based assignments that link literature with personal enhance intrinsic motivation and better enable students to understand and analyze the content at hand while critically reflecting upon themselves and their knowns. Furthermore, with an increase of motivation, students have a better chance of entering states of creative flow. I pause to explain that I diverge from Berman because of his assertion that the act of writing ‘promotes both self-mastery and self-healing.’

This isolated connection to the self and to healing is essentially counterproductive.

Instead, when linking trauma, writing, and healing, I contend that course material, classroom dialogue, and student assignments should be predicated upon the self *and others*. In other words, healing should be intertwined with interconnectedness, with an effort to engage with and enhance relational and cultural bonds as well as positive transformations. Thus, I assert that personal writing may be integrated into classrooms without being solely about the self. In

other words, I promote linking trauma and healing with personal writing within the context of a shared, social story—one that works towards focusing on healing, one that may result in the unknown and the uncomfortable.

Embracing the Pandoric

In order to work within these unknown, and sometimes uncomfortable, situations when engaging with trauma and healing in the context of wounded healers and their stories, I assert that pedagogies that link to personal stories and even invite personal writing should not be identified as being problematic. Rather, they should be viewed as pandoric. In this section, I highlight that pedagogical philosophies, even within composition studies, have relied on methods that are situated upon embracing the uncomfortable, the multiple, the ambiguous, the unknown—the *pandoric*. Thus, in this section, I analyze three pedagogical spaces: Pratt’s “contact zone,” Anzaldúa’s “borderland,” and Bhabha’s “third space.” I do so not only to stress that the uncomfortable, ambiguous, and multiple are being embraced but also to assert that pedagogies should focus on the personal and creative, highlighting women and their texts as wounded healers and healing narratives.

I first acknowledge that including texts by wounded healers is pandoric, uncomfortable and ambiguous, for reasons beyond the possibility that students’ personal writings, personal stories, personal wounds may emerge. In fact, such an act is pandoric simply because of the content embedded within wounded healers’ life-writings, for reasons highlighted throughout this dissertation. Thus, the pandoric nature is due to both the content at hand as well as disclosure of students’ personal stories. I pause to turn to Wendy S. Hesford and her text *Framing Identities: Autobiography and the Politics of Pedagogy*; I do so to highlight the benefit of learning with life-writings. Hesford affirms, “Autobiography...can help students and teachers address diversity in

ways that do not merely celebrate or appropriate differences but that recognize each student's complex identity negotiations and discursive positions" (70). Hesford may be referring directly to students' and their autobiographical writings, but I assert that such a statement also applies to the selected wounded healers and healing narratives for the course. Thus, these stories 'can help students and teachers address diversity in ways that do not merely celebrate or appropriate difference'; rather students, through the lenses of these texts, 'recognize complex identity negotiations' while questioning their preconceived notions, using these narratives as an impetus to examine larger cultural issues, and better acknowledging that these women are more than their words and more than their wounds.

I cite Hesford because she not only advocates for incorporating autobiographical writing in classrooms but also labels the writing classroom as a "contact zone"—the first pedagogical space related to this pandoric aspect that I analyze (51). To explain briefly what is meant by "contact zone," I turn to Mary Louise Pratt, who established this phrase. In her article titled "Arts of the Contact Zone," Pratt explains the "term to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with other, often in the contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (34; qtd in Hall and Rosner 97). Such 'clash[es]' and how these uncomfortable tensions open up spaces for learning have found its place in composition studies and pedagogical arguments. As Hall and Rosner point out that compositionist Patricia Bizzell "helps Pratt achieve the 'patron theorist of composition' status by applying the idea of the contact zone to [the] discipline at large" in her article titled "Contact Zones and English Studies" (103). Thus, the link to this pandoric pedagogy, this contact zone is not new. And it is no surprise that Hesford embraces this concept. Specifically, engaging with composition theorist Min-Zhan Lu,

Hesford writes, “A pedagogy based on the contact-zone concept does not demand the creation of combative or confessional classrooms but, rather, requires the construction of writing and reading spaces that enables writers to experiment with a wider range of viewpoints” (53).

However, while there are benefits to the idea of a “contact zone,” such a concept is not without its faults. In fact, Hall and Rosner caution against creating “contact zones [that] become alternative utopias where difference, not homogeneity, and discord, not agreement, are idealized” (103). Thus, acts that attempt to move beyond similarity may be counterproductive by ‘idealizing’ difference instead of the dominant stories.

I contend that both are problematic. Furthermore, contact zones should not highlight difference or resistance to that difference alone. In other words, the concept should not be equated with only resisting structure, resisting marginalization, resisting knowns; as mentioned in other chapters, resistance cannot, and should not, exist without creation. Thus, the emphasis, when incorporating wounded healers into curricula, should be on creation, on creative acts of moving, and such an emphasis should carry out to the pedagogical philosophy.

This label of contact zone has yet another problem within the context of personal stories of trauma, especially when healing is stressed. Daphne Read effectively points out this particular problem. In her article, “Writing Trauma, History, Story: The Class(room) as Borderland,” Read explains that this “contact zone” is appropriate, to a point, when stories involve trauma. Specifically, she asserts that this concept holds a danger of losing the personal element:

As an intervention in public debates about citizenship, culture and consciousness, the contact-zone model of teaching privileges the public sphere, and this is where [Read] locate[s] the limits of the model. It implicitly sustains the boundaries between the public

and the private...[with an inability to] adequately deal with such issues as domestic abuse and trauma (Read 109).

Such a point resonates with my claim that the topic of trauma should not be contained to the more public traumas, sidelining the personal stories. Rather, the pedagogy involved should highlight not this personal as well as the process, and ‘boundaries between the public and the private’ should be easily crossed—as the personal *is* a shared story, a story that moves.

Viewing these spaces that involve trauma as uncomfortable and noting that Pratt’s contact zone theory is lacking, Read turns to Anzaldúa and her concept of borderland—a concept that has been embraced by pedagogical scholars. Read’s turn is a turn that I proclaim better emphasizes the ambiguous and multiple states, the personal, the *pandoric*.

Read explains that such “borderland” spaces are where “two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, low, and middle class touch, where the space between the two individuals shrinks with intimacy.”¹⁵⁴ I turn to Anzaldúa herself to explain this concept better: “A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary” (70). Such ‘emotional residue’ is a reference to traumatic experiences. Couple this with Anzaldúa’s overt connections to pain and writing, and it is no wonder why a “borderland” concept seems more appropriate, capturing better the essence of trauma while focusing on the personal.

I pause to acknowledge that like the contact zone, a borderland pedagogy has been associated with resistance. In her article titled “Hybridity: A Lens for Understanding Mestizo/a Writers,” Louise Rodriguez Connal claims, “[Anzaldúa] teaches [her readers] that we must *resist and defy* cultural losses by using languages that contribute to and represent our multiplicity”

¹⁵⁴ Read engaging with Anzaldúa 111. Read cites as Anzaldúa’s words – but lacks page number – and I am unable to locate it in Anzaldúa’s text.

(205, my emphasis). But, again, such a statement is not the whole story. In fact, as previously explained in chapter four, Anzaldúa and her writings, her stories, her theories stress the personal and creating anew. Thus, resistance is not without creation.

This form of pedagogical instruction embraces multiplicity and hybridity; it has even been identified as a “hybridized discourse” by composition theorist Joe Marshall Hardin (111). In his text *Opening Spaces: Critical Pedagogy and Resistance Theory in Composition*, Hardin admits that within pedagogies such as a borderland discourse, he “see[s] great possibility for a critical resistance” (111). And such possibility can be accomplished when situating curriculum in what is commonly referred to as a “third space,” a term attributed to Homi K. Bhabha. I mention Hardin because he not only establishes a link to a “third space” but also stresses the personal and creative possibilities intertwined with resistance, albeit implicitly.

These links to the personal and *creative* resistance are more overt for other scholars. For example, in her chapter “Choosing the Margins as a Space of Radical Openness,” hooks affirms,

The site of resistance is continually formed in that segregated culture of opposition that is our critical response to domination. We come to this space through suffering and pain, through struggle... We are transformed, individually, collectively, as we make radical creative space which affirms and sustains our subjectivity, which gives us a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world” (*Yearning*, 153).

hooks’s words encompass how pain holds the potential to yield transformation and how resistance *is* linked to creation, to the creative. Similarly, educational scholar Hongyu Wang views a third pedagogical space as “[t]ransformative,” “[a]ffirmative,” and “[c]reative” (150). This space may also be called the “in-between,” the “interstices,” the “liminal” (Bhabha 2-3). Furthermore, I stress that such a space exists “beyond” and “demands an encounter with

‘newness’” (Bhabha 10). Thus, when incorporating personal stories by wounded healers coupled with meaningful writing assignments, classrooms hold a great potential to ‘[demand] an encounter with “newness.”’

I pause to acknowledge that some critics claim that such spaces are too abstract, too multiple, too open. For example, Deepika Bahri mentions that such a hybrid discourse may result in “a zone of nowhere-ness.”¹⁵⁵ But I contend that such a critique views the unknown as a ‘problem,’ boxing the concept into a tragic hybridized position. Instead, pedagogical scholars should focus on the positive, the possibility, the creative of these spaces.

In her text *The Call from the Stranger on a Journey Home: Curriculum in a Third Space*, Wang writes,

A third space is ineffable. It does not belong to the realm of logic or rationality. What cannot be reasoned becomes the other. It is a space of multiple others interacting through different times and places. What is straight becomes curved, what is bright becomes shadowed, and what is filled becomes empty. The third space is produced by the other in me, which keeps eluding the direct route to the destination (147).

Such a description highlights a space that exists within its contradictions, its incompleteness, its similarities and differences. A space that is multiple, embracing the unknown, the undetermined, the uncomfortable—the pandoric. And when teaching in this space, teachers and students participate in a pedagogy that is “fluid, shifting” and in a pedagogy that “guides students in ‘the

¹⁵⁵ In her article titled “Terms of Engagement: Postcolonialism, Transnationalism, and Composition Studies,” Bahri explains that “[hybrid can suggest] a zone of nowhere-ness and people afloat in a weightless ether of ahistoricity” (80).

upward journey' toward what is good, beautiful, and true in our lives, that which we can never really reach, but always aspire to" (Wang 164).¹⁵⁶

Such pedagogies are more than resistance...

They are creative; they are personal.

They stress the creative; they stress the person/al.

Keeping these philosophies in mind, I outline a pedagogy that exists 'not for the sake of resisting, but for the sake of creating.' *And* for the sake of healing.

A Wounded Healer Pedagogy

I expand upon past pedagogical philosophies, while embracing the pandoric and a third space, in order to focus on healing while refusing to run from the pain. As Henri J. M. Nouwen writes in his book titled *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*, "Those who do not run away from our pains but touch them with compassion bring healing and new strength" (61). Thus, I assert that we, as teachers, should 'touch' the 'pains' of others (both authors and students) 'with compassion' through our pedagogical practices to 'bring healing and new strength' to individuals, to ourselves, and to a discourse where personal trauma stories are too often avoided, silenced. When doing so, pedagogical methods move beyond the personal and creative, encompassing a spiritual aspect.

By intertwining a spiritual link, I suggest that compassion drives teaching practices to 'bring healing and new strength' to classroom participants. This compassion is closely intertwined with love and hope and promotes well-being and interconnectedness, as well as more compassion. Specifically, in this section, I contextualize this connection to the spiritual by engaging primarily with Nouwen and drawing on pedagogical theorists bell hooks and Mary

¹⁵⁶ Wang makes a direct reference to Molly Quinn's text *Going Out, Not Knowing Whither: Education, the Upward Journey, and the Faith of Reason*.

Rose O'Reilley. But before that, I first explain how the concept came to be, situating myself while doing so—a concept that I term a *wounded healer pedagogy*.

How It/I Came to Be

A wounded healer pedagogy has been present in my teaching methods, albeit in bits and pieces and without this specific name for some time. In fact, I have often relied on other scholars when describing my teaching practices. These scholars all work within what I would consider to be healing pedagogies. To elaborate, I have often attached to bell hooks's "engaged pedagogy" and to Paulo Freire's "*conscientização*" and have an appreciation for Nina Asher's "hybrid consciousness" and am intrigued by Thich Nhat Hanh's teachings on love and interbeing. I have also referred to Nel Noddings's "ethics of care" as well as Mary Rose O'Reilley's "contemplative practice."¹⁵⁷ I cite these scholars to identify that they have all played distinctive roles in developing my philosophies, in general. Furthermore, at times, I have wondered with which scholar, with which pedagogical philosophy I align myself most. Knowing that all have been influential, I am not sure if any one label could work on its own. And I am reminded to focus on the fact that I, too, have 'many things' that encompass my views, which are not 'too much' to bear. Rather, such multiplicity merely situates me in a position where I can negotiate among theories adapting them as I see fit and moving between and beyond them as I deem necessary. Thus, all of these theories, and more, play roles in the development of this pedagogy, a pedagogy that is neither one, nor the other, but both one and the other. A pedagogy that is something new—a *wounded healer pedagogy*.

¹⁵⁷ Refer to bell hooks's *Teaching to Transgress: Education as a Practice of Freedom*, Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Nina Asher's "(En)Gendering a Hybrid Consciousness" and "Engaging Difference: Towards a Pedagogy of Interbeing." In addition, refer to Nel Noddings's *Happiness and Education* and Mary Rose O'Reilley. *Radical Presence: Teaching as Contemplative Practice*. Note that my understanding of Hanh is through Asher's "Engaging Difference" article.

I did not have a profound revelation to connect my pieces into one radical, progressive theory. Nor do I claim that this new philosophy is all that radical or progressive. It just makes sense. Furthermore, this philosophy was not forced, but it was not exactly organic either. Rather, it emerged as a happenstance. It evolved based on reading a book.¹⁵⁸

Henri J. M. Nouwen's book *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* proved influential when thinking about teaching, curriculum development, and pedagogical studies.¹⁵⁹ The basis of the book is summed up on its front cover: "In our own woundedness, we can become a source of life for others." Thus, personal stories that involve wounds, from selected texts, from discussions, from assignments, 'can become a source of life for others.' Furthermore, a wounded healer pedagogy links all humanity to a universal call, a call that requires each of us to promote healing. Nouwen writes, "[W]e are all called to be wounded healers" (*WH*, 95).¹⁶⁰ And when engaging with this concept in the context of teaching, we, as teachers and scholars, acknowledge that we have wounds, that our students have wounds, and that we all co-exists in efforts to work towards our individual and communal healing processes.

This explanation has a level of abstraction that is beneficial, that is, indeed, pandoric. Its vagueness allows different interpretations, and teachers may even bring their own experiences, own wounds, our stories into their visions and practices of this pedagogy. Such is bound to create multiple versions; thus, a wounded healer pedagogy is inherently linked to the possibility of many variations, transforming this *wounded healer pedagogy* into a plural concept of healing pedagogies, ones that assisted in the outlining of this specific pedagogy and ones that exceed this explanation as well as my imagination.

¹⁵⁸ I would like to thank the lady at the Buffalo airport for recommending this book, which inspired my dissertation.

¹⁵⁹ Hereafter, this text will be identified as *WH*.

¹⁶⁰ This same idea is repeated in his text *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*.

I assert that a wounded healer pedagogy is grounded upon both love and hope—love for humanity and hope for a better future. Furthermore, it fosters learning through creation and through the personal (shared) story—yielding self-actualization and social awareness. Compassion is at its core, promoting and strengthening well-being and interconnectedness. Before expanding this further, I stress that, like any and all pedagogies, this pedagogy does not guarantee change. Rather, it hopes... And loves.

Rhetoric of Love

Regardless of the variations, healing pedagogies cannot help but encompass a rhetoric of love. They are committed to caring, trusting, and respecting each other within its community, and such commitments may be reflected in the language used, the literature selected, and the assignments that coincide.¹⁶¹

Concurring with bell hooks, I see love as “a choice to connect—to find ourselves in the other” (*love*, 93). Supporting her claim, hooks refers to Fromm and his text *The Art of Loving*, citing the following: “To love somebody is not just a strong feeling—it is a decision, it is a judgment, it is a promise” (qtd in hooks 171). Simply put, it is a ‘choice’ to commit. And I advocate that we, as teachers, strengthen our pedagogical practices by choosing to love. Our colleagues, our students, ourselves—and our teaching. And such ‘love’ will reflect and radiate out when we engage with wounds, with stories that may appear to be ‘too much’ to bear, with stories that r/evolve around and out of love. Thus, when any action, any conversation is joined with the will of love, individuals cannot help but simultaneously empower and positively affect others. Individuals cannot help being ‘rainbows in a cloud.’

¹⁶¹ In her text, *all about love: new visions*, hooks defines the “experience of genuine love” as being inseparable from “a combination of care, commitment, trust, knowledge, responsibility, and respect” (7-8). And these entities should be present in healing pedagogies.

Such a choice enhances communal and relational bonds. Such a choice increase connection while working with an intrinsic motivation, a personal desire to know the ‘self’ better. And as Wang insists, “Teachers and students need to not only share knowledge but also share their lives in an ‘engaged pedagogy’” (158). Engaging with hooks’s concept of engaged pedagogy, which stresses well-being, Wang continues, “Sharing is a process of simultaneously reaching inside and outside to meet the other” (158; hooks, *Teaching*, 15). Wang identifies the ‘other’ as the student (158). But this ‘other’ may also be the authors of the texts or the teacher or even the self (meaning the student), who is working on developing a new self, a mestiza consciousness.

I pause to acknowledge that the divide between teacher and student will always exist to a certain extent, by nature of educational systems, but love and healing can lessen the splits, as these factors genuinely represent sentiments concerned about personal growth and betterment while strengthening communal bonds. Such concern and respect are not ‘performed,’ but is embedded deep within—and most students recognize it when teachers show it, returning the sentiments. Thus, love yields love, enhancing “[c]are and compassion, understanding and forgiveness, fellowship and community” (Nouwen, *WH*, 88-89). And both teachers and students are active participants, continually working toward self- and social- understanding, processes that are never complete, processes predicated upon personal, creative, and spiritual journeys.

I also acknowledge that my words may seem idealistic, *and* I realize that desired outcomes are not always what emerge. I note that Kevin K. Kumashiro’s article titled “Toward a Theory of Anti-Oppressive Education” highlights a similar idea. Kumashiro explains, “‘Conscious-raising’ and ‘empowerment’ assume that knowledge, understanding, and critique lead to personal action and social transformation” often sidelining the idea that students may not

respond in this manner (38). *But* knowing this does not mean that we, as teachers and healers, should not hope.

Hope for educational environments where both students and teachers question their knowns and what is represented. Hope for participants to have the courage to explore the unknowns and to recognize that healing is a possibility. Hope for participants to become critically engaged with themselves and others, recognizing that we are all interconnected and that personal stories are part of larger causes.

Promoting Compassion, Well-Being, and Interconnectedness

I reiterate that such a pedagogy promotes compassion, well-being, and interconnectedness. Drawing on Nouwen, I expand upon these points in order to demonstrate that wounds do not have to be fixed. Rather, simply being present and committed to engaging with the self and others and the multiple stories will open up opportunities to enhance positive transformation. In this sub-section, I link Nouwen with pedagogical theorist Mary Rose O'Reilly to stress these ideas.

Nouwen writes, “Making...wounds a source of healing...does not call for a sharing of superficial personal pains but for a constant willingness to see one’s own pain and suffering as rising from the depth of the human condition which all [individuals] share” (*WH*, 88). Thus, incorporating texts by wounded healers unfolds a connection to a larger ‘human condition,’ and students have the opportunity to recognize wounds, pains, traumas as interconnected, linking individuals regardless and because of race, class, cultural differences while opening up and strengthening individuals’ abilities to catch and share stories—as they recognize that we are all part of a larger story, a story healing.

Nouwen emphasizes that such connections among and across stories is based on compassion: “As healers we have to receive the story of our fellow human beings with a compassionate heart, a heart that does not judge or condemn but recognizes how the stranger’s story connects with our own” (*Reaching*, 96). Furthermore, when exposed to these stories, ‘judg[ment] and condemn[ation]’ should not occur. Such should be stressed when students engage with stories. Furthermore, the stories become catalysts for critical reflection and thinking to emerge due to being *present* with the (personal/shared) story, a story that is connected to larger, cultural matters.

Keeping this in mind, I turn to Mary Rose O’Reilley, who bridges teaching with “radical presence.” In her text, *Radical Presence: Teaching as Contemplative Practice*, O’Reilley explains how mindfulness, how presence fosters one’s commitment to understanding and enhances one’s ability to connect better “to self, to community, and to the revelations of reality” (3). Furthermore, O’Reilley explains that we, as individuals, can “listen someone into existence, encourage a stronger self to emerge or a new talent to flourish,” as O’Reilley puts it (21). Thus, we, as classroom participants, are present with the selected texts, reading these women, these wounded healers ‘into existence’ *and* with each other’s stories, ‘listen[ing] [everyone] into existence [and] encourage[ing] a stronger self to emerge.’

But even being present and catching others’ stories are skills that should be developed—as Nouwen highlights, “listening is an art that must be developed” (95). Critical thinking, self-development, and dedicated reflection are inherently linked, and texts by wounded healers have the potential to strengthen these.¹⁶² Such tasks are aimed at enhancing the ability to ‘receive the story of our fellow human beings’ while “deepen[ing] our awareness of ourselves” (Nouwen,

¹⁶² O’Reilley’s practice calls for “deep listening” as well (19). hooks and O’Reilley intertwine similar ideas on reflection. Referring to Nouwen, hooks states, “Knowing how to be solitary is central to the art of loving” (love, 140). O’Reilley stresses the need to “make a space for [silence] in the classroom” (3).

Reaching, 136). Thus, a wounded healer pedagogy advocates that one is not only present with others' stories but also offers an invitation to one's personal stories.

Implications of a Wounded Healer Pedagogy and Moving Beyond

As previously explained, students writing, disclosing their personal stories should not be viewed as problematic; rather, they are pandoric. However, such is not the sole implication associated with this wounded healer pedagogy. There are two others. First, the pedagogy holds the risk of others' critiquing it based on its name alone. In other words, critics may claim that equating teachers with healers positions them in glorified authoritative roles and assumes that students need healing. Second, the focus on the writer (the student) runs the chance of implying that the act and craft of writing is ignored. In this section, I engage with these two implications by referring to scholars such as bell hooks and Nancy Kuhl, who also engage with these implications. I do so in order to acknowledge the limitations while moving beyond them.

Connecting teachers to healers is not new to pedagogical philosophies. In fact, Nina Asher, Thich Nhat Hanh, and bell hooks make such connections. For my purpose, I turn primarily to hooks. For her, "the teacher as a healer" is one who "empowers students," and she does so in order to nurture "wholeness, a union of mind, body, and spirit," which, in turn, emphasizes nurturing the "well-being" of the entire self (hooks, *Teaching*, 14-15).¹⁶³ Although I concur with moving towards empowering others through stories, acts that work towards bettering the entire self, I note that there is a disconnect with hooks's idea and what I am referring to as a wounded healer pedagogy. This discord rests upon the emphasis of *teacher* as healer.

A similar comparison is made by O'Reilley. She writes, "Those of us who are teachers of English...are in the discipline of storytelling. We are like old shamans sitting around the fire scaring people to death, or saving their lives, or healing their hearts...I teach literature and

¹⁶³ *Teaching* is short for *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*.

writing, so...I tell stories and I listen to stories” (O’Reilley 25). Thus, O’Reilley draws a link between not only stories and healing but also teachers and healers. I stress that this latter is problematic as it does hold the danger of positioning teachers as saviors and assuming that students are in need of healing.¹⁶⁴ More so, and maybe more problematic, this statement neglects to highlight that teachers themselves are in need of healing, and students are also healers. Thus, I conclude that the disconnect is that I assert that we are *all* healers and are *all* in need of healing.

Such a notion that everyone is a healer is predicated upon Nouwen’s stance that ‘we are all called to be wounded healers.’ Furthermore, such a notion stresses a holistic well-being of self of all learning participants.¹⁶⁵ Thus, for me, a *wounded healer pedagogy* links the personal and creative with the spiritual by recognizing that all involved become healers and have a ‘call’ to journey along both personal and communal processes of healing. Teachers. Students. Authors of texts. Thus, students become teachers become healers, and teachers become healers become students. As Nouwen states, “Healers...become students who want to learn” (*Reaching*, 96). About each other. About themselves. About the world. And such connotations blur the divide between teacher-student relationships, stressing that everyone is a healer, an active, generative individual involved with moving with and beyond past wounds.

There is an obvious emphasis on the healer. The person. The writer. And such personal writing, when incorporated into pedagogical methods, may, indeed, be therapeutic. Again, I highlight an apprehension with such connections. In her article titled “Personal Therapeutic Writing vs. Literary Writing,” Nancy Kuhl addresses a concern regarding such an emphasis.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ I would like to thank Jackie Bach and her seminar class for pointing out that there is an underlying assumption that students are in need of saving.

¹⁶⁵ Refer to hooks and Asher, who also stress an emphasis on holistic learning/teaching. Asher acknowledges the difference between Freire and Hanh to stress her holistic pedagogy of “interbeing”: “Freire speaks mostly to the mind, [while] Hanh’s vision of pedagogy emphasizes ‘wholeness, a union of mind, body, and spirit’” (239).

¹⁶⁶ Nancy Kuhl’s “Personal Therapeutic Writing vs. Literary Writing” article distinguishes between expressive writing and creative writing, where Kuhl claims the latter is structured and academic.

Kuhl asserts, “Such classes are destined to be about writers, not about writing” (11). These words are taken out of context, but are applicable. Kuhl speaks against a therapeutic kind of writing, claiming that it is not academic. She writes, “If we allow classes to devolve into writing therapy groups where we give up all criteria for evaluating writing in exchange for equal praise and encouragement for all, we do damage to writing and to those students who aspire to write something other than private journals” (Kuhl 11). And I concur. Thus, I reiterate the link among person, purpose, and process—emphasizing that writing in classrooms, even when linked to healing, holds the purpose of fulfilling course objectives. Furthermore, I argue that we, as teachers, do not lose the ‘teaching’ aspect behind the ‘craft’ of writing when engaging with healing pedagogies.

In addition, we, as teachers, do not have to focus on *only* the writing or *only* the writer. Teaching and assignments may, and should, engage *both*. Doing so allows students to learn and analyze rhetorical situations, adjusting their writing accordingly. Furthermore, such a move holds an added purpose of including assignments that are aimed at encouraging students to become comfortable with their own styles, their own voices, their own stories.

Focusing on *both* writers and their writing also allows assignments to stress the processes of self-development and learning. Furthermore, it links assignments to the multisensory with personal engagement, and such a dual focus, I contend, invites creative expression—which may very well open up more opportunities for healing to occur. As Cathy A. Malchiodi affirms, “[T]he creative process of art making can unleash and transform a wounded heart” (*Soul*, 11).¹⁶⁷ Writing, storying, and storycatching may all be considered as forms of art making. And to ignore the healing potential of these *acts of creative expression*—because trauma, writing, and

¹⁶⁷ Malchiodi continues, “Creative writing, in the form of prose or poetry, deepens the experience of image making and stimulates your creative source in a way that art cannot” (116). Referring to written expression, Malchiodi insists that words go beyond nonverbal forms of art.

healing are not supposed to ‘mix’ in classrooms—is not effective. And when ignoring the healing potential, the role, or rather the call, of a wounded healer is also ignored, silenced.

Learning Anew with Healing Communities and Healing Narratives

Healing narratives by women writers become catalysts for something *more* to emerge. In other words, such an inclusion creates a space for students and teachers not just to read and analyze texts, but to critically reflect upon themselves, their stories, and how these stories play roles in larger ones. Furthermore, these narratives open up opportunities to establish communal bonds among the course’s participants through the sharing and catching of stories. Building upon these points, I conclude by explaining that healing narratives foster healing communities within classrooms, while recognizing women authors as more than wounded, and these communities work with the personal, creative, and spiritual to learn anew.

As Nouwen explains, “[A] healing community [exists] not because pains are alleviated, but because wounds and pains become openings or occasions for a new vision” (*WH*, 94). When classrooms create a dynamic that encourages a healing community to emerge, students better recognize that pains do not have to *fixed*; rather, pains may become instruments of healing, of creating anew, for self and for others. Thus, ‘a new vision’ is possible when recognizing that healing narratives and communities may offer opportunities for insight, enhancing self-actualization, social awareness, and learning anew. This ‘new vision’ is based on a change in perspective, emphasizing that creation, that transformation exist in the aftermath of wounds. But more so, classrooms do not focus on wounds alone; rather, the focus shifts to a personal and communal call of healing, where ‘new vision[s]’ surface—and fear subsides, hope emerges, and love encompasses.

According to bell hooks, a pedagogy that is based on “*eros*,” on love is “a force that enhances our overall effort to be self-actualizing...[while] informing how we know what we know” and “enables both professors and students to use such energy in a classroom setting in ways that invigorate discussion and excite the critical imagination” (*Teaching*, 195). I would expand this to assert that such a pedagogy should also promote healing while stressing that we, and others, are constantly spiraling on our many and varied healing journeys, while simultaneously existing in a larger, collective social journey.

One where we *and* our stories, our healing narratives, matter.

One where we continuously embrace healing opportunities, for self and others.

I close by explaining that a *wounded healer pedagogy* need not overtly ask students to commit to a life-long promise of working towards healing, nor would I suggest it. But like those visitors at Bertha Pappenheim’s grave, who leave ‘small stone[s]...[as] quiet promise[s]’ to continue on a larger, collective journey, the majority of my students’ presence, involvement, and growth throughout the semester serve a metaphorical purpose. Their acts show me that they are dedicated to continuing on their personal journeys while consciously recognizing these journeys as not only their never-ending individual stories but also stories that are, indeed, part of something larger.

It may seem as if this claim rests a lot on hope.

And it does. For hope is a huge aspect.

Where hope is, a *wounded healer pedagogy* can be formed.

And it is here where we love and are loved.

It is here where words become more than words,

and wounds become more than wounds,

and we work in individual and mutual efforts to move towards healing,
efforts that are, indeed, never-ending...

and spiral to new beginnings.

...on May 8, 2007, I ended it.

For good this time.

‘We’ were officially over.

Six years of being ab/used by someone I thought I could never live without.

He ‘loved’ me. In his own way. And I... Truth is, when ‘we’ were together, ‘I’ was missing.

But on May 8, I ended it. I ended ‘us.’

Not the story. But ‘us.’

My journals then, and now, hold story after story after story.

My experiences, my pains, my confusions, my desires, my memories.

Some may say that by writing this story—a story that neither truly begins nor ends, yet is
always beginning and ending—I am simply engaging in some neurotic fetish that keeps ‘him’
alive. Maybe it used to be that. Once upon a time. But not now. Not today.

Rather, this act of writing is one of my methods of engaging with my healing efforts,

a very personal journey,

and a collective journey,

a journey that existed before me,

a journey that exists beyond me,

a journey that continues to remind me that we are all wounded...

and a journey that reminds me that we are more.

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APPENDIX: PERMISSION LETTER

Correspondence granting permission to include article information:

TigerMail Mail - Request to include NCADV article

<https://mail.google.com/a/tigers.lsu.edu/?ui=2&ik=dfd35a5671&view=p...>



Rachel Spear <rspear1@tigers.lsu.edu>

Request to include NCADV article

2 messages

Rachel Spear <rspear1@tigers.lsu.edu>

Fri, Mar 5, 2010 at 11:03 AM

To: gshaw@ncadv.org

Gretchen:

I am writing to request permission to use portions and ideas of my article "Abuse: A Journey Towards Claiming the Term," which was published in NCADV's special issue on Accountability in Spring 2009, in my dissertation titled *More than Words, More than Wounds: (Re)Writing 'Wounded' Women and Healing Pedagogies*.

Please reply at your earliest convenience.

All the best,
Rachel

--

Rachel N. Spear, Ed. S.

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Communication across the Curriculum (CxC)
phone: 225.578.7656; <http://cxc.lsu.edu/ascs>

Calling All LSU Students: Submit your work
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Gretchen <gshaw@ncadv.org>

Fri, Mar 5, 2010 at 11:17 AM

Reply-To: gshaw@ncadv.org

To: Rachel Spear <rspear1@tigers.lsu.edu>

Hi Rachel, absolutely you may use anything you need.

Thank you!

Gretchen
(303) 839-1852 x 107

From: Rachel Spear [<mailto:rspear1@tigers.lsu.edu>]

Sent: Friday, March 05, 2010 10:03 AM

To: gshaw@ncadv.org

Subject: Request to include NCADV article

[Quoted text hidden]

VITA

Rachel N. Spear is a native of Waveland, Mississippi, and attended Millsaps College in Jackson. After graduating *Magna Cum Laude* and *Phi Beta Kappa* with a Bachelor of Arts in 2002, Spear began her graduate studies in the writing program at DePaul University. Spear transferred to Louisiana State University (LSU) in 2004, receiving her Master of Arts in comparative literature and her education specialist degree, respectively in 2006 and 2007.

Spear focuses on life-writing as a form of healing. Her scholarship draws on and links autobiographical and composition studies and psychoanalytic and feminist theories, exploring issues of gender, marginality, identity formation, and authorial voice. Throughout her research, she highlights creative expression and both writing and healing processes. In this particular work, Spear bridges personal and theoretical divides by weaving literary, feminist, and pedagogical studies together through the context of story.